

What Explains Differences in Immigration Policy in Today's Europe?

Germany, Sweden and Hungary

Valeriya Mynak

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | EUROPEAN POLITICS

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how national identity, geopolitical factors, and the 2015/16 refugee crisis have shaped immigration policies in Germany, Sweden, and Hungary, highlighting the broader European divide on immigration. Germany, known for its humanitarian values, initially adopted an open-door policy under Chancellor Merkel but later shifted toward more restrictive measures due to rising populism, security concerns, and resource limitations, particularly through the 2020 Immigration Act. Sweden, once a model of liberal immigration policies, faced challenges in social cohesion and integration, leading to a tightening of asylum rules and family reunification restrictions. In contrast, Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, has maintained a hardline anti-immigration stance, using the crisis to reinforce Hungary's national identity and reject EU solidarity efforts. The paper also explores the EU's principle of solidarity, as outlined in Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which calls for fair burden-sharing. However, the Visegrád Group's resistance highlights how national interests often outweigh EU-wide agreements, revealing the limits of EU cohesion and the complexities of balancing national security, identity, and humanitarian obligations. The paper concludes by advocating for more flexible immigration policies that can address both domestic and broader geopolitical challenges.

The approach to refugees and humanitarian protection varies widely among European Union (EU) member states. Many European countries are tightening their immigration policies through enhanced border controls, restrictive asylum procedures, and limits on family reunification. These measures aim to manage irregular migration and address security and cultural integration concerns. At the same time, some nations are attracting skilled workers to fill labour shortages and support economic growth, as demonstrated by Germany's 2020 Immigration Act and updates to the EU Blue Card system.¹ Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union emphasizes the principle of solidarity in immigration policy, stating that they should be governed by unity "and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member States."² Since its implementation in 2009, this principle has guided many policies, notably in areas like asylum and refugee distribution, financial support, and burden-sharing; strengthening Frontex and external borders, joint operations, and the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund. However, disagreements persist among member states, reflecting differing national interests and priorities. An example of these disagreements are present in the Visegrád Group, a cultural and political alliance of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.³ This group united to advance cooperation in military, economic, cultural, and energy affairs, but has often resisted compliance with EU relocation quotas and emphasized strict control of the EU's external borders,⁴ despite being composed of EU members. Visegrád states argue that the EU should focus on assisting refugees in their countries of origin or neighboring regions. Although the Visegrád countries follow the principle of solidarity with one another, they do not apply the same principle within the EU. Demonstrating that the EU lacks coercive power over member states' national laws and must rely on cooperation from member states to uphold established laws and policies.⁵ Though, member states retain authority over visa conditions, citizenship, integration

processes, and access to national social benefits, leading to a varied approach to asylum seekers across the EU.

The 2015/16 refugee crisis highlighted the EU's struggles to effectively enforce the principle of solidarity, an issue that continues to shape policy and fuel debates over burden-sharing. The rise of populist and far-right parties who portray immigration as a threat to national identity, security, and social cohesion has deepened public polarization and pushed mainstream parties towards more restrictive measures. This growing divide has significant implications for policy-making and political stability, as governments strive to address public concerns while balancing economic needs and international commitments. Consequently, the EU faces a persistent challenge in managing immigration and navigating the continent-wide impacts of the varying levels of cooperation among member states. The selection of Sweden, Germany, and Hungary is particularly relevant in this paper, as these countries represent a spectrum of responses to immigration issues, influenced by geopolitical factors, national identity, and the legacy of the refugee crisis. Sweden, for instance, is often viewed as a liberal outlier in its immigration approach, while Hungary has become emblematic of restrictive policies under Orbán's presidency. Germany stands on a middle ground, balancing humanitarian commitments with political pressures, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015/16 crisis. This paper focuses on how these countries have shifted between liberal and restrictive approaches, illustrating the broader European divide. However, the scope of this paper is limited by the selection of only three countries, and further research is necessary to comprehensively analyze the diverse range of immigration policies across the EU.

Geopolitics

Originally focused on the relationship between geography and politics, the term 'geopolitics' has since broadened to encompass great power rivalries and complex issues.⁶ Today, 'geopolitics' specifically refers to the strategic geopolitical considerations that influence power

1 "Boosting Skilled Immigration - Federal Government," *Die Bundesregierung Informiert*, Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, March 1, 2024, www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/arbeit-und-soziales/skilled-immigration-2264340.

2 EUR-Lex, "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union - Part Three: Union Policies and Internal Actions - Title V: Area of Freedom, Security and Justice - Chapter 2: Policies on Border Checks, Asylum and Immigration - Article 80," *Article*, accessed August 10, 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12008E080>.

3 Visegrád Group, "The Visegrad Group: The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia - About the Visegrád Group," *Visegrad Group*, August 15, 2006, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/home>.

4 Georgi Gotev, "Visegrad summit rejects to migrant quotas," *Euractiv*, September 7, 2015, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/visegrad-summit-rejects-migrant-quotas/>.

5 European Commission, *Implementing EU Law*, October 13, 2022, https://commission.europa.eu/law/application-eu-law/implementing-eu-law_en.

6 Pascal Venier, "Main Theoretical Currents in Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century," *L'espace Politique* 12, no. 12 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1714>.

dynamics, alliances, and conflicts, playing a crucial role in addressing global challenges related to economic and ideological struggles. As conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East intensify, and tension between the United States and China rise, the geopolitical landscape is growing increasingly volatile.⁷ In this era of destabilization, where old systems are crumbling, understanding these dynamics are essential for global leaders navigating emerging alliances and conflicts. Likewise, geopolitics significantly impacts international cooperation and can strain regional institutions like the EU, who must reconcile diverse national policies and interests among its 27 member states while striving to act as a unified global power. The EU's geopolitical considerations shape how the organization itself and its member states align themselves, adopt strategies in response to threats, and engage with global institutions. Since its creation in 1993, European geopolitics have evolved both internally and externally. Internally, the concept of a borderless world has been incorporated in the Schengen Area, which reduces borders between member states and enhances collective security efforts. The removal of internal border checks has led to more coordinated external border controls, with member states aligning on immigration policies and sharing information about security threats through systems like Eurodac (a fingerprint database for asylum seekers) and Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency).⁸ Externally, the EU's enlargement has included new member states, such as the ten Eastern Bloc countries in 2004 and Croatia in 2013.⁹ This expansion led to significant intra-EU migration, sparking mixed reactions in Western Europe and raised concerns about social cohesion, integration, and public services. At times, these issues have resulted in political backlash and anti-immigrant sentiments. These enlargements also brought challenges related to rule-of-law in countries like Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland, necessitating robust reforms that align with the Union's democratic values before further enlargement.¹⁰ Migration remains a critical issue, especially with 281 million internation-

al migrants by mid-2020 worldwide, driven by both voluntary and forced factors.¹¹ Accordingly, geopolitical factors have significantly influenced Germany, Sweden, and Hungary to adopt restrictive immigration policies. Germany's status as a desired destination for migrants due to its strong economy and humanitarian values led to a high intake of refugees. The resulting strain on resources prompted a shift in policies, marked by the new era of 'Zeitenwende,' focusing on making naturalization more accessible for skilled workers while tightening asylum policies. Similarly in Sweden, the influx of refugees strained the country's resources, leading to reduced welfare benefits and stricter residency requirements. This was Sweden's attempt to adjust to its historically open stance to ensure sustainability and followed its Scandinavian neighbors. Meanwhile, Hungary's strategic location as a gateway to the Schengen Area and its important position on the Western Balkan migration route has catalyzed the adoption of highly restrictive immigration policies. For instance, the construction of border fences aims to reduce the high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers entering the country.

Following World War II, northern European countries, including Germany, faced labour shortages due to their rapidly growing economies, while Southern European countries, including Turkey, experienced high unemployment rates.¹² To address these imbalances, Northern European nations introduced guest worker initiatives, with Germany initiating its 'Gastarbeiter' program in 1955. This program attracted foreign workers, primarily from Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey to fill labour gaps and offered promising conditions as incentives to stay. Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, Germany saw a sharp increase in asylum requests, particularly from Eastern, Central Eastern, and Southern Europe. Then, the 2015/16 migration crisis marked the highest level of immigration in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany (with a total of 2.14 million immigrants) also driven by a significant influx of asylum seekers. Illustrating that Germany has consistently been

7 Samuel Brannen, "Four Scenarios for Geopolitical Order in 2025-2030: What Will Great Power Competition Look Like?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 16, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-scenarios-geopolitical-order-2025-2030-what-will-great-power-competition-look>.

8 European Commission, *EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: Reinforced Rules to Tackle Migration Challenges*, Home Affairs, April 30, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-pact-migration-and-asylum-reinforced-rules-tackle-migration-challenges-2024-04-30_en.

9 European Parliament, "40 Years of EU Enlargement - Who Has Joined the EU so Far?" *European Parliament*, n.d., https://www.europarl.europa.eu/external/html/euenlargement/default_en.htm.

10 Luigi Scazzieri, "Will the EU Rethink Enlargement?" *Centre for European Reform*, May 30, 2022, www.cer.eu/publications/archive/bulletin-article/2022/will-eu-rethink-enlargement.

11 International Organization for Migration, *International Migrants: Numbers and Trends. World Migration Report*, 2025, <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/international-migrants-numbers-and-trends>.

12 Saara Koikkalainen, "Borderless Europe: Seven Decades of Free Movement," *Migration Information Source*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.migrationinformation.org/borderless-europe-seven-decades-of-free-movement>.

a desired destination for migrants due to its developing economic market, promising labour opportunities, and welcoming reputation towards refugees. Critics argue that Germany's appeal is largely due to its prosperity and strong welfare state.¹³ Although, research indicates that while liberal-democratic values play a role, economic opportunities are more significant in attracting refugees.¹⁴ Surveys show that refugees from countries like Senegal and Gambia are more attracted by job opportunities than by democratic values; even so, personal connections and economic opportunities remain as key factors.¹⁵ Germany's geopolitical position, coupled with its economic and political influence, makes it an attractive destination for migrants, positioning Germany as a key player in managing migration crises within the EU. Being Europe's largest economy, Germany's immigration policies are driven by economic needs and geopolitical interests, balancing humanitarian values with economic stability. This can be demonstrated by the negotiations between the EU, Germany, and Turkey's cooperative statement on migration in March 2016. This agreement aimed to address the influx of asylum seekers by establishing a 1:1 resettlement mechanism and securing additional support for the Refugee Facility in Turkey, while trying to diminish the influx within EU borders.¹⁶ It is not until recently that Germany's geopolitical shift, termed 'Zeitenwende' by the Social Democratic Party of Germany Chancellor Olaf Scholz, made a profound transformation in its foreign and domestic policies, including immigration. In response to global events like the invasion of Ukraine, Germany has reassessed its security and defense strategies, influencing its approach to immigration, particularly for refugees from conflict zones. "Zeitenwende" reflects a renewed commitment to humanitarian values and solidarity, which could reshape Germany's leadership in EU immigration's policymaking and crisis management.¹⁷ Thus, while the center-left government is making citizenship more accessible for for-

eigners, it is simultaneously tightening asylum policies and focusing on expanding its skilled foreign workforce¹⁸ to balance this humanitarian commitment with caution.

As for Sweden, its geopolitical position in Northern Europe has significantly shaped its immigration policies. Being a Scandinavian nation, Sweden enjoys stability and prosperity, with strong historical, cultural, and economic ties to its neighbors: Denmark, Norway, and Finland. Sweden's geographical location, outside the EU's southern and eastern borders, has traditionally shielded it from the direct migratory pressures faced by countries like Italy, Greece, and Hungary. Since joining the EU in 1995, Sweden has maintained control over its currency and aspects of border management by opting out of the Schengen Agreement's common visa policy and the Eurozone. Nevertheless, Sweden remains aligned with the EU's legal and policy framework on immigration, asylum, and border control, shaped by common agreements and directives. Historically, Sweden has been a strong advocate of liberal and humanitarian policies, emphasizing shared responsibility and human rights. Rooted in its national identity as an altruistic superpower, Sweden is widely recognized for its openness, solidarity, and commitment to social justice.¹⁹ As such, the refugee crisis has had dramatic impacts on Swedish population capacity, comparable only to Germany in terms of refugee arrivals relative to population size.²⁰ Regional coordination with its Scandinavian neighbours on border controls and asylum procedures led to tighter borders, though Sweden had an advantage due to its relatively isolated geographic location, which isolated the country from early waves of migration from the Middle East and North Africa. As the crisis deepened, Sweden became a desired destination due to its humanitarian identity and reputation as a welcoming society. This influx placed significant strain on Sweden's resources, leading to debates about sustainability and integration, resulting in policy changes to address these

13 Dario Portong, "What Makes People Want to Come to Germany," *WZB*, March 26, 2024, <https://www.wzb.eu/en/article/what-makes-people-want-to-come-to-germany>.

14 Portong, "What Makes People."

15 Portong, "What Makes People."

16 Wulf Reiners and Funda Tekin, "Taking Refuge in Leadership? Facilitators and Constraints of Germany's Influence in EU Migration Policy and EU-Turkey Affairs During the Refugee Crisis (2015-2016)," *German Politics* 29, no. 1 (2020): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2019.1566457>.

17 Bernhard Blumenau, "Zeitenwende: The Week That Shook German Politics," *Papiers d'actualité/Current Affairs in Perspective 4 (April 2022)*, *Fondation Pierre du Bois pour l'histoire du temps présent*, <https://www.fondation-pierredubois.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2022-no4-April-Blumenau.pdf>.

18 Damien McGuinness, "Ukraine War: Germany's Conundrum over its Ties with Russia," *BBC NEWS*, April 17, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61118706>.

19 United Nations, "UN Expert Hails Sweden as Role Model for Human Rights-Based International Aid and Solidarity," *OHCHR*, May 1, 2018, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/05/un-expert-hails-sweden-role-model-human-rights-based-international-aid-and.

20 Anniken Hagelund, "After the Refugee Crisis: Public Discourse and Policy Change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden," *Comparative Migration Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0169-8>.

concerns. Since then, both welfare benefits and opportunities for permanent residence have been decreased.

Prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain in November 1989, Hungary was a ‘closed’ country with limited migration flows, shaped by state-controlled inward and outward migration policies. After the collapse of communism and the subsequent opening of borders, Hungary experienced significant migration inflows from neighboring countries. Hungary’s accession to the EU in 2004 intensified these trends, resulting in a 35% increase in the emigration of Hungarian workers compared to 2003. At the same time, the country saw a significant influx of migrants from neighboring eastern nations in search of better opportunities. Hungary’s geographical location, serving as a key gateway to the Schengen Area and a crucial point along the Western Balkan migration route, has profoundly influenced its restrictive immigration policies. The Western Balkan route was the second most active migratory path into the EU, accounting for 26% of irregular crossings in 2023.²¹ As a major transit country for migrants moving from Asia to the EU, Hungary’s borders became a focal point during the 2015/2016 refugee crisis. With 411,515 documented crossings, Hungary ranked second in the EU, behind Greece, in detaining undocumented migrants at its external borders that year.²² In response to increased migration pressures, Hungary constructed fences along its southern borders with Serbia and Croatia, reinforcing strict immigration controls. These measures reflect Hungary’s strategic role in managing migration routes and could be seen as an extension of the EU’s broader efforts to strengthen border controls.²³ As a member of the Visegrád Group, Hungary adopted an anti-immigration stance, opposing the EU’s proposed refugee quota system alongside its neighbors Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. This group advocates for ‘flexible solidarity,’ allowing states to choose their contribution to migration policy and blocking reforms to the Dublin

Regulation, reflecting Hungary’s border politics and broader ideological and geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, the political dramatization of border issues and humanitarian crises at the EU’s external borders has contributed to a climate of xenophobia and fear. Since returning to power in 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has shaped Hungary’s diplomacy around his leadership, prioritizing national sovereignty and pushing back against EU pressures. His approach became especially pronounced during the 2015/2016 refugee crisis, when his government fueled xenophobic rhetoric against asylum seekers. His confrontational approach has garnered support from right-wing groups across Europe. However, Hungary faces significant challenges in fulfilling its obligations within the EU, particularly in meeting relocation quotas and addressing burden-sharing issues.

The Aftermath of the 2015/16 Refugee Crisis

In the first nine months of 2015, over 487,000 people arrived at Europe’s Mediterranean shores, doubling the total number of migrants and refugees of 2014, setting a record.²⁴ “By the end of 2016, nearly 5.2 million refugees and migrants reached European shores,”²⁵ a number equivalent to Finland’s entire population in 2023. The journey was dangerous, with nearly 3,000 people dying while crossing the Mediterranean in 2015 alone and this number remained steady at 2,400 deaths reported in 2022, not including those who perished in transit.²⁶ The concept of a ‘crisis’ can be understood through the arrival of one million asylum seekers in 2015, symbolizing a ‘crisis’ of protection originating in the Global South.²⁷ This led to the emergence of the phrase ‘European crisis of migration,’ with various sources describing the situation as ‘existential,’ ‘biblical,’ and ‘political,’²⁸ making many European politicians view these arrivals as a threat to national security, identity, and cultural homogeneity.

21 Frontex, European Border and Coast Guard Agency, “Significant Rise in Irregular Border Crossings in 2023, Highest Since 2016,” *Frontex*, January 26, 2024, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/significant-rise-in-irregular-border-crossings-in-2023-highest-since-2016-C0gGpm>.

22 International Organization for Migration – Hungary, “The European Migration Crisis and Hungary,” n.d, hungary.iom.int/european-migration-crisis-and-hungary#:~:~=Additionally%2C%20climbing%20through%20the%20border.

23 James W. Scott, “Hungarian Border Politics as an Anti-Politics of the European Union,” *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3 (2020): 659, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1548438>.

24 Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan and Susan Fratzke, “Europe’s Migration Crisis in Context: Why Now and What Next?” *Migration Policy Institute*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/europes-migration-crisis-context-why-now-and-what-next>.

25 USA for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “Refugee Crisis in Europe: Aid, Statistics and News,” *UNHCR*, accessed August 13, 2024, www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/europe/.

26 USA for UNHCR, “Refugee Crisis in Europe,” *UNHCR*, 2024,

27 Maissaa Almustafa, “Reframing Refugee Crisis: A ‘European Crisis of Migration’ or a ‘Crisis of Protection?’” *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40, no. 5 (2022): 1065, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654421989705>.

28 Almustafa, “Reframing Refugee Crisis,” 1065.

In 2015, the UNHCR recorded 65.3 million displaced individuals worldwide, including 21.3 million refugees, the highest number since the agency was established in the U.S. in 1949.²⁹ The surge in arrivals was driven by increasing numbers of Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, Afghans, and Eritreans fleeing conflict, ethnic strife, or economic hardship. The scale of the crisis necessitated a unified European response, as individual countries could not manage it alone. Frontline states, like Greece and Italy, bore the brunt of the new arrivals, while transit countries such as Hungary and Croatia, faced immense pressure at their borders. Wealthier EU nations, like Germany and Sweden, had to handle the massive influx of refugees, as these countries were sought-after final destinations.

Unmistakably, it is the opportunity to reach Europe and rebuild a life uninterrupted by conflict or persecution is a key driver for many refugees; however, policy announcements and social media have created new pull factors. Reports of successful arrivals, along with favorable asylum policies in countries like Germany and Sweden, motivated more refugees to embark on the journey in search of safety and better opportunities. More specifically, social media spread success stories and practical advice, while initiatives like “Airbnb for refugees” and slow processing of claims at borders facilitated refugees’ journeys. Many Europeans felt overwhelmed by the influx, leading to support for populist and xenophobic parties, while others called for stronger humanitarian and rights-based commitments from EU leaders. The perception of refugees as burdens or ‘uninvited migrants’ led to marginalization and criminalization, undermining core refugee protection principles.³⁰ The influx of refugees has put significant strain on the EU’s political unity and democratic framework, exposing weaknesses in the Common European Asylum System and ultimately escalating into a crisis within the EU. Many Global North countries have responded by implementing containment and deterrence measures, aiming to limit their commitments and keep refugees in regions facing severe conditions,³¹ failing to fulfill their international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

The EU still face challenges, particularly with its problematic Dublin system, which places the responsibility for asylum claims on the first country of arrival. Southern European countries are overwhelmed, while Western and Northern Europe bear the burden of integration.

The accession of new member states in 2004, many of which are inexperienced in handling non-European refugees, exacerbated the situation.³² In response, the EU proposed the 2020 New Migration Pact, which aims to harmonize asylum procedures, speed up processing, and establish solidarity mechanisms for member states to assist with relocation, funding, or returns to countries of birth. While the plan faced resistance, progress has been made, including the establishment of the EU Agency for Asylum; however, member states remain free to follow their own domestic policies. The 2015/16 refugee crisis marked a turning point in Germany and Sweden’s immigration policies, while reinforcing Hungary’s longstanding restrictive stance. Initially guided by humanitarian principles and solidarity, Germany’s open-door policy under Chancellor Merkel and Sweden’s tradition of welcoming refugees were clear examples of their openness. However, both countries shifted towards more restrictive approaches due to rising right-wing populism, security concerns, and fears of overextending national resources. In contrast, Hungary used the crisis to further entrench its anti-immigration stance, with the influx of refugees across its borders fueling Orbán’s rhetoric and solidifying xenophobic sentiments in the country.

The 2015/16 refugee crisis had a profound impact on Germany, which received over one million asylum seekers, predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This influx placed immense pressure on Germany’s asylum system, housing, education, and social services. In response, Chancellor Angela Merkel suspended the EU’s Dublin Regulation on August 25, 2015, allowing Syrians to have their asylum applications processed in Germany even if they had passed through other European countries.³³ This marked the beginning of Merkel’s open-door policy; providing refugees with temporary housing, daily allowances, work permits,

29 Adrian Edwards, “Global forced displacement hits record high,” UNHCR, June 20, 2016, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high>.

30 Laura Zanfrini, “Europe and the Refugee Crisis: A Challenge to Our Civilization,” *United Nations*, accessed August 12, 2024, www.un.org/en/academic-impact/europe-and-refugee-crisis-challenge-our-civilization.

31 Zanfrini, “Europe and the Refugee Crisis: A Challenge to Our Civilization.”

32 Camino Martinez-Mortera, “Europe’s Forgotten Refugee Crisis,” *Centre for European Reform*, May 24, 2017, <https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/bulletin-article/2017/europes-forgotten-refugee-crisis>.

33 Annisa Nabilatul Khaira, Yusra Mohammad, and Dermawan Rifki, “Angela Merkel’s Perception and Open Door Policy During the 2015 European Refugee Crisis,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional* 18, no. 1 (n.d.): 2, Parahyangan Catholic University.

and language training. Merkel's famous statement, 'Wir schaffen das' ('We can do this'),³⁴ highlighted her commitment to handle the crisis by emphasizing integration and support, in contrast to other European countries that pursued more restrictive measures. As a result of Germany's humanitarian approach, the country became a top destination for refugees in Europe in 2015, receiving 441,800 individuals, accounting for 35.2% of the total 1.25 million refugees who arrived in Europe that year.³⁵ Many Germans viewed the open-door policy as a threat to national stability, fearing job losses and increased terrorism. Many criticized Merkel's approaches, contributing to the rise of support for the right-wing Alternative for Germany party and the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West Movement (PEDIGA), prompting anti-immigrant sentiments. After her term ended in 2021, Merkel did not seek re-election, leading to the Christian Democratic Union's loss in the federal election and the formation of a new center-left coalition led by Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the Social Democratic Party, along with the Greens and the Free Democratic Party. The new leadership established stricter immigration policies, including tighter asylum procedures, increased deportations, and a shift towards more restrictive measures, while also focusing on easing immigration for skilled workers. The introduction of the Repatriation Improvement Act accelerated deportations by eliminating advance notifications, extending asylum detention to 28 days, and providing the police authority to search properties of individuals ordered to leave.³⁶ Between January and April 2024, Germany deported about 6,300 people, with an additional 240,000 required to leave due to issues like missing identity documents or considered safe conditions in their home countries.³⁷ Plans were also made to revise the EU Return Directive to streamline rejections and maintain strict border control with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland. Asylum procedures will be

expedited, aiming to finalize applications within three to six months. Funding will shift from the annual budget of €3.7 billion to a lump-sum payment of €7,500 per asylum seeker.³⁸ This reform, described by the Chancellor as a funding adjustment based on the number of asylum seekers. The government also aims to proclaim more countries as 'safe' to focus resources on higher-need cases, negotiating agreements with "Georgia, Moldova, Kenya, Colombia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan."³⁹ The move toward more restrictive immigration policies was driven by fears of the growing influence of the far-right Alternative for Germany party. Their strong performance in the European Parliament elections and potential dominance in eastern German states raised concerns about the destabilization of the current center-left government and complicating Germany's political image.⁴⁰

Swedish citizens view immigration as essential to economic sustainability and national growth, particularly in the context of globalization.⁴¹ This perspective is reinforced by government reports from 2010 and 2015; the 2015 report specifically highlighted immigration's role in alleviating the financial strain of the Swedish aging population.⁴² While immigration is critical for meeting labour market demands and bolstering public finances, challenges such as discrimination, limited social networks, and language barriers hinder immigrants' full integration into the workforce. This crisis led to a re-evaluation of Sweden's role in the global migration system, resulting in a more cautious approach to immigration. It also left a lasting impact on Swedish politics, notably through the rise of the Sweden Democrats whose nationalist and anti-immigration stance shifted the political landscape. The popularity of the Sweden Democrats mainstreamed far-right rhetoric regarding immigration, resulting in a restrictive shift in policy discussions. The party advocates for a nationalist stance, prioritizes cultural assimilation, and rejects multiculturalism. Their proposed policies include amplifying

34 Olga Mikhina, Artem Mikhin, and Svetlana Shulezhkova, "'Wir Schaffen Das!' (Angela Merkel as a Linguistic Persona)," *SHS Web of Conferences* 50 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20185001013>.

35 Khaira et al., "Angela Merkel's Perception and Open Door Policy During the 2015 European Refugee Crisis," 6.

36 Oliver Pieper, "German Immigration Policy: What's Changing in 2024?" *Deutsche Welle*, January 1, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-immigration-policy-whats-changing-in-2024/a-67753472>.

37 Sabine Kinkartz, "Germany: Far-Right AfD's Gains Driving Immigration Debate," *Deutsche Welle*, June 21, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-far-right-afds-gains-driving-immigration-debate/a-69438902>.

38 "Germany Agrees on Stricter Measures to Curb Migration," *Euronews*, November 7, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/11/07/germany-agrees-on-strict-measures-to-curb-migration>.

39 Pieper, "German Immigration Policy."

40 Kinkartz, "Germany: Far-Right AfD's Gains Driving Immigration Debate," 2024.

41 Joachim Vogt Isaksen, "The Framing of Immigration and Integration in Sweden and Norway: A Comparative Study of Official Government Reports," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 10, no. 1 (2020): 113, <https://doi.org/10.2478/NJMR-2019-0033>.

42 Isaksen, "The Framing of Immigration," 113.

citizenship requirements, offering economic incentives for immigrants to return to their home countries, and tightening border control. The Swedish government's plan to reduce social benefits for non-European immigrants intends to discourage immigration. The Sweden Democrats argue that high unemployment and welfare dependency among foreign-born individuals exacerbate social divisions. They frequently target non-European immigrants, particularly Muslims, accusing them of contributing to crime and undermining national unity and welfare.⁴³ The refugee crisis of 2015/16 prompted a dramatic shift in Sweden's immigration policy, leading to the implementation of temporary border controls and stricter asylum laws. This marked a significant departure from Sweden's longstanding tradition of generously offering asylum to refugees from conflict zones. A 2016 law generated various changes within immigration policies: replacing permanent residency with temporary permits, imposing rigorous family reunification rules, reducing social benefits, and reforming the reception system to manage asylum applications more effectively.⁴⁴ Recent events, such as increased terrorist threats linked to perceptions of Sweden as hostile to Islam, have further complicated the immigration debate. In August 2023, Sweden raised its terrorist threat alert to level four out of five due to increased threats from violent Islamism.⁴⁵ This rise in threats was largely attributed to the perception of Sweden as hostile to Islam, due to Swedish national shootings abroad and jihadist threats. Despite shifts in policy and rhetoric Sweden's approach to immigration, the country's policies remain broader than other EU countries, where rights and benefits are often tied to economic self-sufficiency and acculturation.

Hungary is the second EU country, after Greece, to be confronted with the highest surge of undocumented migrants.⁴⁶ In response to this national issue, Hungary constructed fences along its southern borders with

Serbia and Croatia, significantly reducing daily arrivals. Alongside these physical barriers, Hungary enacted legal reforms, such as designating Serbia as a safe third country to expedite asylum procedures and limit protections for applicants. The creation of transit zones in Röszke and Tompa, where only five people per day can enter, further restricted legal migration routes.⁴⁷ A 2016 amendment to the Asylum Law mandated the expulsion of migrants who entered 'illegally' and were detained within 8 kilometers of the border. These measures faced condemnation from the European Court of Human Rights for violating migrant rights and led to legal action from the EU for Hungary's non-compliance with asylum laws and refugee quotas. In response to these criticisms, Hungary introduced new immigration laws in 2024, which included 24 categories of residency permits and a 'golden visa' for long-term residence through real estate investment.⁴⁸ These laws reflect a shift towards a more restrictive immigration framework, prioritizing local jobs for Hungarians, limiting work opportunities for third-country nationals, and enhancing immigration management. Left-wing parties have criticized these changes; for this reason, Orbán asserts that Hungary operates differently from Brussels, emphasizing its stance against migration, illegal immigration, and support for traditional family models and national sovereignty. He portrays Hungary as "an island of difference in the vast European liberal sea"⁴⁹ with concerns like terrorism and migration being central to his political narrative. Orbán frames EU migration policies as threats to Hungarian sovereignty, emphasizing his desire to protect Hungary's Christian identity. Hungary's response to the refugee crisis included building border fences, rejecting EU's huge influx of refugees through Hungary's borders aided Orbán in spreading his anti-immigration rheto-

43 Bulent Kenes, "The Sweden Democrats: Killer of Swedish Exceptionalism," *ECPS Party Profiles. European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS)*, August 3, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.55271/op0001>.

44 Kenes, "The Sweden Democrats."

45 Ministry of Justice, "Swedish Security Service Raises Terror Threat Level," *Regeringskansliet*, August 21, 2023, <https://www.government.se/artikles/2023/08/swedish-security-service-raises-terror-threat-level/>.

46 International Organization for Migration, "The European Migration Crisis and Hungary / IOM Hungary," 2023.

47 Nóra Köves, "Hungary 2017: Detained refugees, persecuted NGOs, lack of legal certainty," *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.boell.de/en/2018/01/03/hungary-2017-detained-refugees-persecuted-ngos-lack-legal-certainty>.

48 European Union, "Hungary: New Immigration Law Affects Residence Permits," *Migration and Home Affairs*, March 1, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/hungary-new-immigration-law-affects-residence-permits-2024-03-01_en.

49 Viktor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán: A New Era Is about to Begin," *Orbán Viktor*, June 30, 2024, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/prime-minister-viktor-orban-a-new-era-is-about-to-begin/>.

ric, essentially solidifying xenophobia in the country.

National Identity

The concept of identity extends to individuals and larger political entities like regional organizations. The EU has developed a multifaceted identity shaped by its political and economic integration, shared values (e.g. democracy and human rights), and its diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. Its goal is to foster a sense of unity and belonging among member states while globally promoting its values.⁵⁰ Although, within the EU each 27 member states possess their own identities, influenced by unique histories, cultural heritages, languages, and social diversities. This mix of shared culture and political fragmentation results in a more complex European identity, often facing challenges of balancing these diverse national identities. The EU must balance upholding European values while respecting the unique identity and sovereignty of each country. Member states follow EU policies and frameworks but retain authority over specific matters: immigration and asylum policies, social welfare, and national defense. The EU's initial response to the 2015/16 refugee crisis was deeply influenced by its identity as a defender of human rights and humanitarian values,⁵¹ evident in the open-door policies of many member states and the EU's focus on providing humanitarian aid to asylum seekers. Yet, as the crisis evolved and resources strained, public perception shifted, leading to policy changes in both regional and national levels. In most cases, immigration physically and politically challenges the boundaries of a community's identity.⁵² Immigration raises questions about the values and tenets on which society is built upon, including those shaped by nationalistic myths and shared history. Large-scale migration often provokes alarmist reactions and attempts to impose arbitrary criteria on immigrants. For example, some EU countries have faced pressure to prioritize Christian migrants over Muslim migrants, despite the EU's rejection of including Christian roots in its constitution.⁵³ Such reactionary criteria threaten to weaken the EU's core principles of universal rights and

human dignity. This dynamic is particularly evident in developing democracies in Eastern Europe, which are still recovering from a history of ethnic cleansing, forced migration, and adjusting to post-communist life; thus, are hesitant to open their borders to ethnic and religious minorities.⁵⁴ With limited experience with such groups, their perspectives are often shaped by alarmist fears of terrorism. National communities have traditionally defined their identity by distinguishing themselves from 'others' (such as foreigners), from whom they sought to separate or separate themselves from. Thus, national identity cannot be solely defined by geographical location, religious composition, or linguistic homogeneity. Instead, some theorists emphasize the intangible essence of nationality: a shared belief in common descent and ethnic relatedness.⁵⁵ Governments will attempt to balance humanitarian obligations with the need to preserve social harmony and cultural continuity. For example, Germany's post-World War II commitment to militant democracy and its evolving multicultural identity to clear its national consciousness shifted after a huge influx of refugees, leading to Germany now restricting asylum migration and implementing policies favorable only for foreign skilled workers. Sweden's national identity blends inclusivity and exclusivity, emphasizing language, respect for institutions, and belonging. In recent years Sweden has shifted towards restrictive policies due to concerns about multiculturalism, integration, and social cohesion. Lastly, in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has reinforced the significance of national identity through rhetoric that portrays immigration as a threat, shaping the country's strict policies and influencing a negative public perception towards immigration.

After World War II, Germany's national identity underwent a significant transformation as the Federal Republic adopted the concept of militant democracy. This system was designed to defend against anti-democratic forces, even if it meant imposing restrictions on certain rights like free speech.⁵⁶ The constitution incorporated proactive preemptive measures, such as banning extremist parties, to prevent the exploitation of

50 Thierry Chopin, "Europe and the Identity Challenge: Who Are 'We'?" *Robert Schuman Foundation*, March 18, 2018, <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0466-europe-and-the-identity-challenge-who-are-we>.

51 Sergio Carrera et al., "The EU's Response to the Refugee Crisis: Taking Stock and Setting Policy Priorities," *Centre for European Policy Studies*, (2015); https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/EU%20Response%20to%20the%202015%20Refugee%20Crisis_0.pdf.

52 Francis Fukuyama, "Why National Identity Matters," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0058>.

53 Zanfrini, "Europe and the Refugee Crisis: A Challenge to Our Civilization," 2022.

54 Zanfrini, "Europe and the Refugee Crisis: A Challenge to Our Civilization," 2022.

55 Anna Triandafyllidou, "National Identity and the 'Other,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 4 (1998): 594, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198798329784>.

56 Ruth Wittlinger, *German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century: A Different Republic After All?* (Springer, 2010), 4.

democratic processes and the constitutional order. Internationally, Germany pursued a low-profile, multilateral approach, concentrating on rebuilding trust, ensuring security against the Soviet threat, and committing to human rights and liberal democracy. Germany's identity post-WWII underpinned their openness to immigration, particularly in granting asylum to those fleeing persecution. This context is crucial for understanding Angela Merkel's decisions, especially her Open Door Policy during the 2015/16 refugee crisis. Merkel's approach was deeply influenced by the Holocaust's profound impact on Germany's national consciousness and international image, shaping its beliefs and decision-making.⁵⁷ Germany's openness is also reflected in the Gastarbeiter period, when many Turkish workers, initially intended to stay temporarily, chose to remain in Germany and bring their families. By 2010, approximately 4 million people of Turkish descent lived in Germany, though this number decreased by about 1 million by 2024.⁵⁸ Over time, multiculturalism became a part of Germany's national identity, though the country faced challenges. In 2010, Merkel herself acknowledged these challenges in a speech, declaring that multiculturalism had failed.⁵⁹ The debate intensified with changes in citizenship law, which required young migrants to choose between German citizenship and that of their parents' country, a contentious issue within the Turkish community. The debate over dual citizenship continues, with some fearing it could hinder integration, while others argue it promotes acceptance of diversity.⁶⁰ The 2015/16 refugee crisis exacerbated these ongoing national debates, presenting significant challenges to Germany's national identity. Rapid demographic changes and integration difficulties led to discussions about the limits of multiculturalism and the need to protect German culture and values. By the end of 2015, with over one million new arrivals registered, public opinion became increasingly polarized. Senti-

ments ranged from 'We can do this'⁶¹ to doubts about Germany's capacity to manage the influx of refugees. This polarization was reflected in increased levels of hate speech, arson, and crimes against refugees and those assisting them. The rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which gained seats in five state parliaments, further shifted the political landscape. The AfD does not oppose all immigration, instead they advocate for a more selective immigration policy a skilled labour migration. The party's growing influence, particularly in Eastern states like Saxony and Brandenburg,⁶² poses challenges for current coalitions which could weaken the center-left government. In response, the German government has moved towards restrictive measures, aiming to balance humanitarian obligations with the need to preserve social harmony and cultural continuity. This shift is evident in Germany's recent immigration laws, enacted in June 2023 and set to take effect by March 2024.⁶³ The reforms include making the EU Blue Card program more accessible and flexible; expanding eligibility for individuals in the IT sector and education, and introducing the 'Opportunity Card' for foreign professionals without a job offer.

Swedish national identity is shaped by a blend of inclusivity and exclusivity, with particular emphasis on language proficiency, respect for political institutions, and a strong sense of belonging. A profound feeling of 'Swedishness' is deeply felt by those who already identify as Swedish, whereas for non-Swedes, it can seem less relevant.⁶⁴ Historically, Sweden has been recognized for its values of openness, tolerance, and humanitarianism. Since the post-World War II era, it has embraced its role as a global advocate for social democracy and human rights, offering refuge to those fleeing conflicts and strongly supporting their integration. This openness to immigration, evident from its labour migration policies and acceptance of refugees, was emphasized by a strong welfare state designed to integrate newcomers, often

57 Khaira et al., "Angela Merkel's Perception and Open Door Policy During the 2015 European Refugee Crisis," 4.

58 Alice Dundon, "How Berlin Became the World's Second Turkish Capital," *Culture Trip*, March 6, 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/how-berlin-became-the-worlds-second-turkish-capital>.

59 "Merkel says German multicultural society has failed," *BBC News*, October 17, 2010, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11559451>.

60 Ben Knight, "Germany Reforms Citizenship Law," *Deutsche Welle*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-reforms-citizenship-law/a-63987066>.

61 "We Can Do It: Angela Merkel on Immigration Politics," *Epicenter* (blog), Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, accessed March 16, 2025, <https://epicenter.wcfia.harvard.edu/blog/we-can-do-it-angela-merkel-immigration-politics>.

62 Kinkartz, "Germany: Far-Right AfD's Gains," 2024.

63 "The Skilled Immigration Act," *Make It in Germany*, accessed August 12, 2024, www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/visa-residence/skilled-immigration-act.

64 Hans Lödén, "Swedish: Being or Becoming? Immigration, National Identity and the Democratic State," *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology* 16 (2008): 709, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Swedish%3A-Being-or-Becoming-%3A-Immigration%2C-National-L%C3%B6d%C3%A9n/381ae356e107533c05ad9611130af94982aff9dd>.

referred to as ‘Swedish exceptionalism.’⁶⁵ However, in recent years, the Sweden Democrats have argued that multiculturalism threatens Sweden’s cultural community. Their definition of Swedish identity emphasizes a ‘principal Swedish identity,’⁶⁶ which they constitute as belonging to those perceived as Swedish by themselves and others. The party’s rhetoric, encapsulated in the phrase ‘Sweden belongs to the Swedes,’⁶⁷ underscores their commitment to protecting Swedish cultural values. They frame immigration as a threat to ethnonational identity: causing increased crime and social insecurity, a contributor to unemployment, and abusive to the welfare state.⁶⁸ These views reflect concerns with ethnopluralism and overtake cultural preservation and welfare chauvinism, seeing immigrants as competitors for limited resources. The large influx of refugees from non-European and Muslim-majority countries, particularly during the 2015/16 refugee crisis, strained Sweden’s capacity for integration and fueled debates about the impacts on national identity and social cohesion. As challenges such as segregation, unemployment, and social exclusion became more pronounced, concerns grew that Sweden’s social cohesion was under threat, particularly given its commitment to ideals like women’s rights, LGBTQ+ acceptance, and other liberal values.⁶⁹ Rising anxiety led to a shift toward severe restrictions: temporary residence permits, stricter family reunification rules, and reduced social benefits, aimed at managing immigration and protecting national identity. Although initially framed as temporary, these policies have had lasting impacts, particularly on family reunification and integration requirements for citizenship. The Swedish government emphasized the need for equitable burden-sharing across Europe while maintaining their hu-

manitarian values and addressing practical challenges.

National identity has been a central element of Hungarian culture in both historical and contemporary politics. Following World War II, Hungary was heavily influenced by Soviet rule and in 1948 a pro-Soviet government came to power. During this period, Hungarians struggled to preserve their national identity, as seen during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. This revolt prominently displayed Hungarian symbols and was driven by young Hungarians’ dissatisfaction with the oppressive regime and its disregard for Hungarian history.⁷⁰ In the present day, under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, national identity has taken on a more divisive role. Orbán’s government has used the concept of Hungarian identity to shape policies, particularly concerning immigration. His rhetoric frames immigration as a threat to Hungary’s national character and cultural integrity. This was evident in the October 2016 referendum on whether the European Parliament should mandate migrant resettlements in Hungary. Orbán presented the referendum as a matter of national sovereignty, but the campaign also reflected broader cultural concerns. Orbán referred to refugees as ‘poison’ to Hungarian society,⁷¹ and many Hungarians voted against the quota to protect their national identity during the referendum. Moreover, Orbán’s vision of ‘illiberal democracy’⁷² includes rejecting traditional liberal values in favor of a nationalist approach, leading to restrictions on academic and media freedoms. The ‘Stop Soros’ law is a key example of how Orbán used anti-immigrant and anti-minority rhetoric to consolidate his political base and suppress opposition. Named after George Soros, a Hungarian American billionaire, investor, and philanthropist known for funding pro-democracy and human rights initiatives, the law specifically targets organizations supporting migrants and asylum seekers. It imposes strict regulations on NGOs, criminalizes aid to undocumented migrants, and rein-

65 Magnus Dahlstedt and Anders Neergaard, “Crisis of Solidarity? Changing Welfare and Migration Regimes in Sweden,” *Critical Sociology* 45, no. 1 (2019): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920516675204>.

66 Kenes, “The Sweden Democrats,” 14.

67 Kenes, “The Sweden Democrats,” 14.

68 Kenes, “The Sweden Democrats,” 5.

69 Dahlstedt and Neergaard, “Crisis of Solidarity? Changing Welfare,” 128.

70 Ferenc Laczó, “Hungarian Uprising: From the Power of a Symbol to a Symbol of Power?” *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, November 3, 2016, <https://www.boell.de/en/2016/11/03/power-symbol-symbol-power-commemorating-1956-hungary-today>.

71 Sadie Levy Gale, “Hungarian Prime Minister Calls Migrants Entering Europe a ‘Poison’: ‘Whoever Needs Migrants Can Take Them, but Don’t Force Them on Us, We Don’t Need Them,’” *The Independent*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-hungary-migrants-europe-prime-minister-viktor-orban-asylum-seekers-a7157871.html>.

72 András Bíró-Nagy, *Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: The Social Background and Practical Steps of Building an Illiberal State* (Barcelona: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, 2017), 36, <https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/illiberal-democracy-hungary-social-background-and-practical-steps-building-illiberal>.

forces physical barriers to migration. Beyond restricting immigration, the law serves as a tool for weakening civil society and eliminating dissenting voices.⁷³ The 2015/16 migration crisis, the Hungarian government consistently used terms like ‘illegal migrants’ and ‘economic migrants’ instead of ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘refugees’ to shape public perception. Orbán has claimed that Europe is “in the grip of madness over immigration and refugees,”⁷⁴ and has argued that many migrants are ‘not Christians, but Muslims,’⁷⁵ which he views as a threat to Europe’s Christian identity. To protect this identity, he asserts that Hungary “has no option but to defend [its] borders.”⁷⁶ According to a Pew Research Center survey, over 82% of Hungarians believe “refugees are a burden”⁷⁷ who take away jobs and social benefits; more than 76% think “refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism,”⁷⁸ and over 69% view “large numbers of refugees leaving Syria/Iraq”⁷⁹ as a major threat. This indicates that Orbán’s rhetoric have been effective in emphasizing Hungarian national identity and its preservation, aiming to justify restrictive policies and reinforce political support.

To conclude, divergent approaches to immigration laws in Germany, Sweden, and Hungary underscore the profound influence of national identity, geopolitical factors, and the lasting consequences of the 2015/16 refugee crisis. Germany’s shift toward a more restrictive policy, tempered by its focus on skilled migration, reflects a re-evaluation of its humanitarian commitments considering resource constraints and the rise of populist sentiment. Sweden’s transition from a traditionally open and liberal stance to strict measures illustrate the tension between inclusivity and the need to address concerns about social cohesion and integration. Hungary’s strict immigration policies and its opposition to the EU’s solidarity principle highlight how immigration rhetoric can be strategically employed to reinforce political stability and protect national identity. These contrasting approaches emphasize the challenge of balancing national interests with humanitarian responsibilities a balance

that remains elusive for many EU member states. The fragmented response to immigration in Germany, Sweden and Hungary highlights the need for cohesive and flexible EU policies that account for both the internal pressures of member states and the broader geopolitical context. Moving forward, researchers should explore how national identity continues to shape immigration policies in the post-crisis era, examining the long-term effects of populist movements and the ongoing evolution of public opinion on migration. This research could offer valuable insights into the tensions between sovereignty and solidarity within the EU and provide guidance for crafting more sustainable immigration frameworks that address both humanitarian needs and national concerns.

73 Zack Beauchamp, “Hungary just passed a ‘Stop Soros’ law that makes it illegal to help undocumented migrants,” *Vox*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/6/22/17493070/hungary-stop-soros-orban>.

74 Ian Traynor, “Migration Crisis: Hungary PM Says Europe in Grip of Madness,” *The Guardian*, September 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/03/migration-crisis-hungary-pm-victor-orban-europe-response-madness>.

75 Traynor, “Migration Crisis.”

76 Qirui Li, Xiongzhen Teng, and Tianhao Yuan, “An Analysis on Factors That Contributed to the Popularity of the Hungary Right-Wing Populist Fidesz Party between the Years 2008-2020,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 631 (2021): 549, <https://www.atlantispress.com/proceedings/sdmc-21/125968453>.

77 Li, Teng, and Yuan, “An Analysis,” 549.

78 Li, Teng, and Yuan, “An Analysis,” 549.

79 Li, Teng, and Yuan, “An Analysis,” 549.