Deserving and undeserving refugees?

An analysis of the EU's response to the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 compared to the refugee influx from Ukraine in 2022

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Abstract

After the European Union adopted unprecedented measures to provide protection and support to refugees from Ukraine, criticism arose accusing the EU of applying double standards with regard to migration. People fleeing to Europe in 2015 faced strict border controls, relocation to detention centers, or illegal pushbacks. This research explains the diverging responses to refugees using the concept of deservingness. The perceived identity of refugees and feelings of proximity with hosting societies influence whether they are seen as deserving of protection or not. The media and statements by politicians play an important role in shaping the discourse about migrants and whether they are close enough to 'us' to deserve protection. By comparing media reporting, speeches and social media content about refugees in 2015 and 2022, this research argues that different factors combined with each other result in the perception of deservingness of refugees from Ukraine while it is ambiguous with previous refugees. Among the factors influencing public opinion are the perceived level of victimhood, knowledge about the context of the flight, identification with the refugees, geographical proximity, and (social) media representation.

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I want to thank my cohort and the previous cohort for inspirational conversations inside and outside the classroom and for supporting each other during these challenging times. We can be so proud of us. My gratitude goes also to my family and friends for their unconditional love, endless support and understanding.

The research for this thesis was supposed to happen in Ukraine, it was supposed to be about a theatre project with a great Ukrainian team. Instead, I wrote about Ukrainian refugees. Hopefully we will be able to conduct our project in the near future. Until then I want to thank my sister in Kyiv and my mother for being a source of strength and inspiration.

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List of Abbreviations

CoE	Council of Europe
EU	European Union
IS	Islamic State
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
U.S.	United States of America
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee

Introduction

This research project evolved as the European Union was at the center of attention because of the millions of Ukrainians seeking protection from Russian atrocities. The open border policy and the unprecedented measures to help the refugees provoked critical questions about double standards when it comes to migration – delving into this criticism lies at the core of this thesis. More than 5 million people fled from Ukraine to other European countries after Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022[1]. The international community promptly condemned Russia's action[2] and the people fleeing were met with an unprecedented wave of solidarity, empathy, and welcomeness. Ukraine's neighboring countries, followed by other states such as Germany, virtually opened their borders, allowing people to seek refuge with little to no bureaucratic or legal hurdles. On March 4 the Council of the European Union unanimously adopted an emergency mechanism granting temporary protection for everyone affected by the war in Ukraine. According to this decision "Member States must provide persons enjoying temporary protection with residence permits […] and issue documents or other equivalent evidence for that purpose […] until 4 March 2023."[3] Permits issued on these humanitarian grounds give access to health care, social welfare, or the labor market.

The rapid and unbureaucratic access to safety is the only adequate response to a humanitarian crisis of this scale, but at the same time, it raises questions about double standards

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[1] "Ukraine Refugee Situation," Operational Data Portal UNHCR, accessed May 27, 2022, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#_ga=2.7422708.758230476.1647352253-1158439311.1599737261.

[2] "World Reaction to the Invasion of Ukraine," Wilson Center, February 24, 2022, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/world-reaction-invasion-ukraine.

[3] "Communication from the Commission on Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Council Implementing Decision 2022/382 Establishing the Existence of a Mass Influx of Displaced Persons from Ukraine within the Meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and Having the Effect of Introducing Temporary Protection 2022/C 126 I/01," EUR-Lex, March 21, 2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022XC0321%2803%29&qid=1647940863274.

towards refugees depending on their country of origin. In stark contrast to the current handling of refugees from Ukraine, people fleeing from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Eritrea, were earlier met with strict border controls, relocation to detention centers, or illegal pushbacks[4]. Their arrival prompted the building of border walls[5] and increased the militarization of EU borders[6]. There are reports of cases in which people fleeing from Ukraine have been treated differently based on their appearance or nationality and experienced discrimination at border crossings[7]. This thesis explores the reasons for this contrasting handling of refugees by the EU and its member states by comparing the discourse in 2015, the year of the 'refugee crisis', and in 2022 concerning refugees from Ukraine. My research examines whether and why some refugees are subject to 'othering' while others are portrayed as 'part of us' and how this influences their perceived deservingness. I explore what role the assigned identity of refugees plays and what the discourse in Europe is regarding (a) the characteristics of refugees and (b) the reasons to feel responsible for the protection of refugees.

I aim to contribute to a growing number of critical assessments of the EU's response to refugees and migration while advocating for equal treatment of those forcefully displaced. Understanding the different reasons why some refugees are more welcome than others will enable progressive forces to campaign for a better and humane management of migration, since climate change and conflicts will inevitably cause more refugees in the future. The complex issue of migration requires nuanced analyses that take into account various factors that, in

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[4] "Frontex at Fault: European Border Force Complicit in 'Illegal' Pushbacks," bellingcat, October 23, 2020, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/10/23/frontex-at-fault-european-border-force-complicit-in-illegal-pushbacks/.

[5] "Poland Starts Building Wall to Deter Migrants," InfoMigrants, January 25, 2022, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/38122/poland-starts-building-wall-to-deter-migrants.

[6] Mark Akkerman, "Militarization of European Border Security," in *The Emergence of EU Defense Research Policy*, ed. Nikolaos Karampekios, Iraklis Oikonomou, and Elias G. Carayannis, Innovation, Technology, and Knowledge Management (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 337–55, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68807-7_18.

[7] "Poland: Refugees Face Chaos, Racism and Risk of Trafficking after Fleeing Ukraine - New Research," Amnesty International UK Press releases, March 22, 2022, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/poland-refugees-face-chaos-racism-and-risk-trafficking-after-fleeing-ukraine-new.

combination with each other, result in more or less welcoming policies by the EU and its member states.

A vast number of media reporting points to the double standards in the EU regarding immigration and criticizes the underlying racism when it comes to the treatment and media portrayal of refugees[8]. Taking a closer look at the initial reactions towards refugees from Ukraine compared with those concerning refugees from other countries throughout 2015 raises questions that require assessing the EU's approach from a holistic perspective. In a recent article in *Foreign Policy* Simon Frankel Pratt and Christopher David LaRoche[9] argue that these double standards arise because of less perceived distance to Ukrainians. Their argument builds on various aspects beyond race and shows that the issue is analyzed best with a nuanced approach that considers more than one explanatory factor.

The reasons behind diverging reactions to immigrants are a complex entanglement of identity politics[10], self-conception of states and their citizens[11], gendered and racialized narratives[12], media coverage[13], geographic aspects[14], and securitization[15]. This thesis untangles some of these strands to provide a better understanding of underlying facets that in combination with each other result in policies which unjustly differentiate between refugees based on their

race, ethnicity, gender, education, or ostensible deservingness and victimhood. Existing research exploring the question suggests that various elements together result in different policies, focusing on only one of them is nearsighted and does not reflect reality. Therefore, the analytical part of this thesis follows an intersectional approach[16] and examines several factors that can cause discriminatory migration policies; they are subsumed in two broader categories: identity and proximity.

One common approach to explain migration policies and reactions to the 'refugee crisis' builds on the Copenhagen school centered around securitization and identity management as developed by Barry Buzan *et al.*[17] and focuses on the securitizing speech act. Buildings on this Tal Dingott Alkopher[18] includes socio-psychological factors in her research and provides a nuanced analysis of reactions by the EU and member states towards migration. The great amount and variety of research concerned with critically assessing the issue of migration and the resulting securitization contribute to a better understanding of the political decisions made during the 'crisis' in 2015[19]. Even though previous research successfully uses securitization to explore questions about changing migration policies, it cannot be used as the main theory in my research because Ukrainian refugees are not (yet) subject to securitization. Furthermore, investigating attitudes and policies towards migration is not equivalent to securitization, the discourse around it has more nuances than the focus Copenhagen scholars

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[16] Ramon Grosfoguel, Laura Oso, and Anastasia Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies: Framing Some Theoretical Reflections," *Identities* 22, no. 6 (2015): 635–52, https://doi.org/doi=10.1080/1070289X.2014.950974.

[17] Barry Buzan, "Societal security, state security and internationalism," in *Identity, migration and the new security agenda in Europe*, ed. Ole Weaver, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, and Pierre Lemaitre (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 41–58.

[18] Dingott Alkopher, "Socio-Psychological Reactions in the EU to Immigration."

[19] For example: Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5 (December 2000): 751–77, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00263; Tal Dingott Alkopher and Emmanuelle Blanc, "Schengen Area Shaken: The Impact of Immigration-Related Threat Perceptions on the European Security Community," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 511–42, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-016-0005-9; Akkerman, "Militarization of European Border Security"; Megan Daigle, Sarah Martin, and Henri Myrttinen, "'Stranger Danger' and the Gendered/Racialised Construction of Threats in Humanitarianism," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 2, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 4–13, https://doi.org/10.7227/JHA.047.

might suggest. The securitization of previous migration flows through the act of speech did not start immediately but accelerated over time[20]. In 2015 solidarity and welcomeness were slowly outweighed with skepticism over the summer and after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November replaced with securitization. This thesis analyses the reactions in the first weeks (Ukraine) and first months (previous migration) of arrivals when securitizing discourse and securitization coexist with humanitarian incentives and do not prevail them.

Therefore, the theoretical framework in this thesis is *deservingness* as formulated by Wim van Oorschot[21]. Inspired by Alkopher's work, it includes socio-psychological concepts that are focused on the perceived identity and victimhood of refugees, their belonging to 'us' or 'the other' and how the assigned characteristics influence their perception as deserving of protection. My methodology acknowledges the importance of the speech act as introduced by the Copenhagen school[22] and follows its logic of an actor performing the speech act and an accepting or refusing audience. I however do not focus on the securitization of refugees but on their framing as deserving or not deserving through discourse in the media and by politicians.

Divided into three main chapters, this thesis provides a review of existing literature on migration in Europe and the underlying socio-psychological effects and introduces the theoretical framework as well as the methodology in Chapter 1. Chapters 2 and 3 constitute the analytical part where the two explanatory categories – identity and proximity - are used to compare the discourse about the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 with the influx of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 through the lens of deservingness. The analysis of political communication and media reporting in Chapter 2 focused on identity examines how the perception of Ukrainian refugees as European family members who are 'one of us' influences their deservingness compared to

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[20] Alkopher and Blanc, "Schengen Area Shaken," 531.

[21] Wim van Oorschot, "Who Should Get What, and Why? On Deservingness Criteria and the Conditionality of Solidarity among the Public," *Policy & Politics* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): 33–48, https://doi.org/10.1332/0305573002500811.

[22] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 491.

the assigned identity of other refugees as anonymous, male, non-European 'other'. Positive characteristics of the former are highlighted in the discourse while the portrayal of the latter omits information about individuals presenting them as one unfamiliar mass. Chapter 3 explores how factors such as geographical closeness, shared history, knowledge about the context of the flight and social media representation influence the feeling of proximity with the refugees and indirectly result in more or less perceived deservingness. It elaborates how the fact that Russia is the clear aggressor in Ukraine causing a major crisis in Europe unites people in opposing Russia and in supporting Ukrainians. Previous refugees, on the other hand, were themselves framed as the crisis, which led to Member States showing solidarity to each other and uniting against refugees.

Chapter 1 Literature review, theoretical framework and methodology

1.1 Literature on European migration policy

The war in Ukraine started in 2014 but the latest escalation – the invasion of the country by Russian forces and a full-fledged war - is so recent that most of the literature around the issue can be found in news articles and journals. One article published in April 2022 looks at the "borders of (in)solidarity"[23] in Poland where the double-standards are particularly visible: Since summer 2021 refugees from the Middle East stranded at the border between Belarus and Poland because both states refuse them while at the same time Poland received more than two million Ukrainian refugees since February 2022. The authors conclude that "we are dealing with a combination of historical, political, religious-cultural, gender and psychological factors" and that hospitability towards migrants needs advocacy that goes beyond moral arguments. The handling of previous refugee flows to Europe such as the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 produced a huge and diverse amount of academic literature. Due to limited space the following review summarizes important pieces that were formative during my research process. It reflects that securitization is an important theoretic fundament to explore migration but also that the topic has many other nuances to it which is why I chose a different and holistic approach.

My research – the development of the theoretical framework and the analytical approach – follows the conviction that questions like mine that explore unequal treatment and inevitably deal with oppression, power relations and racism need to be addressed from an intersectional perspective. The arguments presented in "'Racism', intersectionality and migration studies: framing some theoretical reflections"[24] support this idea. By theorizing about the various hierarchies and forms of oppression in our "imperial/capitalist/colonial world

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[23] Opioła et al., "War and Politics. The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Refugee Crisis on the Eastern EU Border from the Perspective of Border Studies."

[24] Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies."

[where] race constitutes the transversal dividing line that cuts across multiple power relations such as class, sexual and gender relations on a global scale" [25] they conclude that intersectionality is necessary for ethical knowledge production when studying migration.

Not from an epistemological point of view, but nevertheless influential for this research is the work of Tal Dingott Alkopher[26]. To explain different reactions within the EU towards immigration she uses ontological security and securitization as a starting point and refines them with three 'socio-psychological lenses'. After analyzing the discourse about migrants in the media and by politicians she detects three different mechanisms of dealing with the issue: uncontrolled migration creates ontological insecurity within Member states (mainly the Visegrad 4) which leads to an inward focus emphasizing national identity justifying closed borders to restore the ontological security. The European Commission displays the second mechanism by balancing border protection and humanitarianism to counter the ontological insecurity within the Union created by skeptical Member states. The third reaction (mainly by Germany and Sweden) is to actively desecuritize migration because the national identity is seen as cosmopolitan and open-minded. Alkopher's socio-psychological approach proves to be fruitful for analyzing and understanding different governmental reactions towards migration.

The EU's answer to refugees, the resulting border practices and the increasing securitization of migration are further discussed by various scholars[27]. Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert[28] elaborate on the changed meaning of securitization at European borders by the border agency Frontex through comparing its proceedings in 2005/2006 and in 2015/2016. They argue that technological advancement and the continuously growing focus on security

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[25] Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies: Framing Some Theoretical Reflections." 637.

[26] Dingott Alkopher, "Socio-Psychological Reactions in the EU to Immigration."

[27] For example: Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration"; C.A.S.E. Collective, "Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto," *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 4 (December 2006): 443–87, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010606073085.

[28] Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, "The Securitisation of Migration in the European Union: Frontex and Its Evolving Security Practices," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, December 18, 2020, 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1851469.

issues enabled Frontex to establish securitizing practices that do not depend on justification through the securitizing speech act. The increased power of the agency, its professionalization and self-representation as expert on risk analysis and border protection causes scholars to critically assess Frontex' work and investigate its gendered and racialized use of language and images[29].

A closer analysis of those who are subject to securitization and resulting practices is provided by Catarina Kinnvall[30] through a postcolonial lens. She illustrates how the colonial history of Europe shapes narratives around immigrants and subjects them as the colonial other. On the one hand is Europe with a privileged society understanding itself as liberal, modern, and representative of Western values while immigrants are the voiceless, racialized, and gendered other that can pose a threat to the European values thus legitimizing defensive practices.

This balance between Europe's values centered around human rights and parallel to that the ostensible need to protect those values from outsiders represents an ambiguous task that is discussed by feminist scholars[31]. Polly Pallister-Wilkins[32] analyzes the development of humanitarian work at European borders over the last years and how the adoption of humanitarian argumentation reproduces inequalities and justifies discriminatory border

[29] For example: Saskia Stachowitsch and Julia Sachseder, "The Gendered and Racialized Politics of Risk Analysis. The Case of Frontex," *Critical Studies on Security* 7, no. 2 (May 4, 2019): 107–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2019.1644050; Trym N. Fjørtoft, "More Power, More Control: The Legitimizing Role of Expertise in Frontex after the Refugee Crisis," *Regulation & Governance* 16, no. 2 (2020): 557–71, https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12373.

[30] Catarina Kinnvall, "The Postcolonial Has Moved into Europe: Bordering, Security and Ethno-Cultural Belonging: The Postcolonial Has Moved into Europe," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 54, no. 1 (January 2016): 152–68, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12326.

[31] For example: Nina Perkowski, "Frontex and the Convergence of Humanitarianism, Human Rights and Security," *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 6 (December 2018): 457–75, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618796670; Natalie Welfens, "Protecting Refugees Inside, Protecting Borders Abroad? Gender in the EU's Responses to the 'Refugee Crisis,'" *Political Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (August 2020): 378–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929919887349; Nina Sahraoui, "Gendering the Care/Control Nexus of the Humanitarian Border: Women's Bodies and Gendered Control of Mobility in a EUropean Borderland," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 5 (October 1, 2020): 905–22, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820925487.

[32] Polly Pallister-Wilkins, "Humanitarian Borderwork," in *Border Politics*, ed. Cengiz Günay and Nina Witjes (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 85–103, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46855-6_6.

practices. Rescue operations are intended to save the lives of fleeing people but at the same time, they allow greater policing of illegal migration and serve as justification for extending Frontex's mandate, controlling migrants, and relocating European borders for example by outsourcing them to Libya. Pallister-Wilkins argues that the humanitarian argument to save lives serves not only to consolidate borders but also to differentiate between people who deserve protection and those who do not.

1.2 Conceptualizing deservingness

The question who is perceived as deserving or not concerned sociologists in the last century mainly with regard to the welfare state. Wim van Oorschot[33] suggests five criteria that influence whether people are seen as deserving of welfare payments like unemployment benefits or not. The criteria are control, need, identity, attitude, and reciprocity. Central for the analytical framework of this research is *identity* which van Oorschot describes as "the identity of the poor, […] their 'pleasantness'; the closer to 'us', the more deserving"[34]. According to the author it is an influential factor if the person receiving support is perceived as a member of the group of the help providers and indicates the importance of social identity, the construction of boundaries between groups and the labeling of some people as the 'other'. This conceptualization of deservingness was already applied in the context of migration and attitudes towards immigrants but mostly in relation to the welfare state and various authors conclude that being identified as 'other', not belonging to the in-group results in being perceived as less deserving[35].

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[33] Oorschot, "Who Should Get What, and Why?"

[34] Oorschot, 36.

[35] For example: Anouk Kootstra, "Chapter 14: Us versus Them: Examining the Perceived Deservingness of Minority Groups in the British Welfare State Using a Survey Experiment," in *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785367212.00030; Erwin Gielens, Femke Roosma, and Peter Achterberg, "Deservingness in the Eye of the Beholder: A Vignette Study on the Moderating Role of Cultural Profiles in Supporting Activation Policies," *International Journal of Social Welfare* 28, no. 4 (October 2019): 442–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12392.

Previously used in sociological studies Talia Shiff[36] applies deservingness to the field of International Relations by analyzing how the belonging to certain social groups influences the perceived worthiness of asylum seekers in the U.S. Depending on their assigned belonging different policies are applied to them. Her work analyzes the issue of discriminatory migration policies in the North American context and supports the choice of my own approach using deservingness.

The belonging to a social group while denying 'the other' access to this group constitutes an important mechanism in perceived deservingness. Why and how individuals categorize themselves and other individuals resulting in the assignment of group membership and outlining the boundaries of different groups is explained by social identity theory[37]. Based on the work of Henri Tajfel[38] in the 1970s the theory explains the relationship of individuals with other individuals depending on their belonging to social groups. He aimed to explain discrimination and prejudice in society and found that belonging to a certain group is an influential factor even if the groups are assigned through arbitrary criteria in experiments. Self-identity is strongly related to group membership, identifying with one or more social groups provides orientation for individuals while also enhancing differentiation from others. There are in-groups and out-groups, dividing individuals into 'us' versus 'them' depending on their perceived group membership. Research suggests a positive bias towards members of the in-group while negative characteristics of the out-group are highlighted and exaggerated.

This assigned group-membership serves Sarah Charman[39] as the explanation for perceived deservingness when analyzing policing practices in Britain. Her study is an important

[36] Talia Shiff, "Reconfiguring the Deserving Refugee: Cultural Categories of Worth and the Making of Refugee Policy," *Law & Society Review* 54, no. 1 (2020): 102–32, https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12456.

[37] Gazi Islam, "Social Identity Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (July 29, 2014): 1781-3.

[38] Henri Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Scientific American* 223, no. 5 (1970): 96–103.

[39] Sarah Charman, "Making Sense of Policing Identities: The 'Deserving' and the 'Undeserving' in Policing Accounts of Victimisation," *Policing and Society* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 81–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2019.1601721.

example for my work because she analyzes structural discrimination by state organs through deservingness and she uses identity as an analytical tool to explain the different treatment of individuals and their categorization as deserving or undeserving. In Charman's research the identity of victims of crime is defined by their economic situation, the neighborhood they live in or their own criminal history and influences whether they are perceived as deserving of police protection or not. However, the identity categories can be broader and include "race, income, employment, mental health, gender and age"[40].

This brings another concept into the discussion which is the victimization of individuals and the notion of the "ideal victim" as coined by Nils Christie[41]. Connected with deservingness this means that individuals that are perceived as real or ideal victims - meaning that their victimization is successful - will lead to a greater deservingness of justice or protection. The label as victim is assigned from the outside and the individual has little influence on being labeled as a victim. Important factors are whether someone is perceived as weak and vulnerable, inculpable, and ideally facing a great and strong offender unknown to the victim.

This assignment of victimhood from the outside is explored by Lisa J. Long[42] when she uses critical race theory to analyze how people of color are subject to racist police practices and non-victimization that deprive them of receiving help and justice. They are "not only non-ideal victims; their racialized construction as the 'suspect' is incongruous with the ideal victim, and they are constructed as the 'ideal offender'"[43]. These findings clearly show the connection between one's race and their portrayal as victim, non-victim or even offender.

The quoted authors published work mainly in the field of social psychology, criminology or in the context of the welfare state and categories such as the victim have to be

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[40] Charman, 85.
[41] Nils Christie, "The Ideal Victim," in *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy: Reorienting the Justice System*, ed. Ezzat A. Fattah (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986), 17–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-08305-3_2.
[42] Lisa J. Long, "The Ideal Victim: A Critical Race Theory (CRT) Approach," *International Review of Victimology* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2021): 344–62, https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758021993339.
[43] Long, 357.

transferred to the context of my research. Here the potential victims are forcibly displaced individuals and deservingness refers to protection by the EU and the right to claim asylum.

The existing literature concerned with immigration to the EU entails a broad strand of theories and analytical lenses to illuminate the issue. Based on the fruitful research conducted by other scholars I determined one analytical framework that enables a holistic analysis of the multilayered research topic: deservingness as spelled out by Wim van Oorschot complemented by social identity theory and the notion of the ideal victim. It looks at refugees on an individual level to understand how their identities are represented, and to what extent they are portrayed as victims, as one of 'us' or if they are subject to othering. It analyzes how the intersection of different characteristics influence the perceived victimhood and their vulnerability, if they are deemed worth of protection or not. Are they seen as 'ideal victims', non-victims or even offenders? Are they perceived as members of the in-group or the out-group and therefore more or less deserving of protection?

1.3 Identity and Proximity as analytical categories

Through discourse and content analysis the theoretical framework of deservingness will be applied to two analytical categories that entail a broad range of explanatory factors contributing to the different treatment of refugees from Ukraine compared to other refugees. The analytical category in Chapter 2 is identity, which covers individual characteristics assigned to refugees such as their gender, race, or age and explores how these intersect and influence their perceived deservingness. The category of proximity, central in Chapter 3, refers to geographical aspects, shared history, knowledge about the context of a flight and how close and responsible hosting societies feel for groups of migrants.

While in the context of Ukrainian refugees the starting date for analysis is clearly defined by the beginning of the war on the 24th of February – this triggered the influx of more than 5 million refugees from Ukraine to Europe – it is less obvious with the 'refugee crisis' in

2015. The European Union always experienced immigration, but in 2014 "detections of illegal border-crossing reached a new record, with more than 280,000 detections" according to the Annual Risk Analysis of Frontex[44]. In 2015 the numbers grew further, reaching their peak in summer and accumulating to more than 1,8 million detections of illegal border crossings[45]. The increase of asylum seekers trying to enter the EU illegally[46] was coined as 'refugee crisis' and refers to the unprecedented number of refugees seeking safety in the EU. For comparability with the Ukrainian case my analysis focuses on February to early September 2015 because during these months the topic of migration starkly entered the consciousness of the European society and the issue gained increased attention throughout these months producing a wide range of material for the analysis.

Since the core of this thesis is analyzing how refugees and their reasons to flee are represented the empirics are drawn from sources that contribute to and shape public discourse. Besides press statements by EU representatives and speeches by European politicians, media reporting and visual depiction are important sources because "news narratives are considered to be [...] a key source of knowledge through which the continent's collective perceptions of refugees emerge."[47] For the refugee influx in 2015 scholars already conducted extensive research and examined the discourse and media narratives providing me with valuable empirics[48].

[44] "Annual Risk Analysis 2015," Frontex, April, 2015, https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2015.pdf.

[45] "Risk Analysis for 2016," Frontex, March, 2016, https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf.

[46] Here it is important to remember that Ukrainians were met with open borders, they never had to take the risk of entering illegally. What 'illegal border crossings' are can be defined by the EU and its bodies and is not something naturally given.

[47] Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, "Voice and Community in the 2015 Refugee Crisis," 614.

[48] For example: Tal Dingott Alkopher, "The Political Psychology of Integration Strategies: The Case of the European Commission's Interculturalism," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 4 (October 1, 2015): 428–54, https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2014.28; Annabelle Cathryn Wilmott, "The Politics of Photography: Visual Depictions of Syrian Refugees in U.K. Online Media," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 67–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2017.1307113; Lamour, "Mass Media and Border Securitization in Europe"; Réka Benczes and Bence Ságvári, "Migrants Are Not Welcome: Metaphorical Framing of Fled People in Hungarian Online Media, 2015–2018," *Journal of Language and Politics*, July 16, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.20042.ben.

The two reports "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries"[49] (UNHCR report) conducted for the UNHCR and published in 2015 and "Council of Europe report: Media coverage of the "refugee crisis": A cross-European perspective"[50] (CoE report) published in 2017 provide findings about 2500 news articles in eleven European countries. It would have been beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze such an amount of coverage therefore I rely on these detailed, nuanced, and transparent documents as my sources for the media analysis in Chapters 2.1 and 3.1

For the coverage about refugees from Ukraine analyzed in Chapters 2.2 and 3.2 I looked at media reporting in English from various outlets across the world and consulted two of the German newspapers that were analyzed by the above-mentioned reports in 2015 for comparability. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is the German quality newspaper with the highest circulation and is considered central to central-left, *Die Welt* is a quality newspaper with a smaller circulation and considered conservative.

Each chapter will first analyze the empirics on refugees in 2015, proceed with refugees from Ukraine and finally compare the main findings and their implications for perceived deservingness. Chapter 2 focuses on the identity assigned to refugees, Chapter 3 on feelings of proximity with the refugees and their plight.

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[49] Mike Berry, Inaki Garcia-Blanco, and Kerry Moore, "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, December, 2015, 1-277.
[50] Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski, "Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," Council of Europe report DG1(2017)03, 2017, 1-24.

Chapter 2 – The framing of refugees' identities and its impact on perceived deservingness

The following chapter examines how refugees are represented in the media and by EU politicians and how conclusions about their identity and victimhood influence the perceived deservingness. The analysis looks at the use of language and how migration is framed, which information about refugees as individuals are provided, and which are omitted and how the use of pictures influences the discourse.

2.1 The framing of refugees' identities in 2015

In this subchapter two reports mainly contribute the empirics on media coverage during the evolving 'refugee crisis' in 2015. The authors of the Council of Europe (CoE) report analyzed 1200 newspaper articles of qualitative press across the political spectrum in eight European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Serbia, UK) plus two Arabic-language newspapers and conclude that overall, the media representation of refugees is very narrow, gives little voice to the migrants and nourishes certain prejudices. They strongly advocate for stricter media guidelines to foster fair and ethical journalism[51]. The authors of the report for the UNHCR analyzed a variety of media reporting in UK, Germany, Spain, Italy and Sweden in 2014 and early 2015. One of the main findings is that the media paid little attention to the positive sides of migration and how host countries can benefit from it[52]. Both reports identify anti-immigrant tendencies in the analyzed articles, the radicalism and amount of such notions vary from country to country. They highlight throughout their analysis how influential media narratives are in shaping the public perception of migration and what a

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[51] Georgiou and Zaborowski, "Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," 5.
[52] Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries," 12.

great impact they can have in informing policy makers especially during evolving crisis with little other sources available[53].

The CoE study distinguishes between three time periods each of them reflecting different attitudes towards migration and slightly diverging narratives. Due to the complexity of the migration flows in 2015 – changing routes, different border crossings under pressure - the suggested division helps for a better understanding of the changing discourse: Period 1 from July to September 2015 was characterized by "careful tolerance". A balance between humanitarian efforts fueled by many reported drownings in the Mediterranean on the one hand and on the other hand anxiety and concern about Europe's security. Period 2 starts on September 2nd with the worldwide publication of photographs showing dead Alan Kurdi at the Turkish shore. The toddler died as his family attempted to reach a Greek island with a boat and the pictures of his body fueled humanitarianism and solidarity to unseen heights[54]. Period 3 starts in November 2015 after the terrorist attacks in Paris marking the shift towards the heavy securitization of immigration and therefore not part of this analysis.

The thousandfold publication of Alan Kurdi's pictures caused "ecstatic humanitarianism"[55] and constituted a turning point in media reporting, attitudes and actions concerning refugees. Researchers found that the photos of Alan Kurdi made their way from twitter through other platforms to the screens of millions of users and changed the whole discourse towards the increased usage of the positive connotated word "refugee" instead of the neutral to negative connotated "migrant"[56]. How can it be that one picture changes not only how people talk about migration but also the willingness to donate and even influence EU

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[53] Georgiou and Zaborowski, "Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," 4; Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries," 5.
[54] Georgiou and Zaborowski, "Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," 8.
[55] Georgiou and Zaborowski, 8.
[56] "Aylan Kurdi: How a Single Image Transformed the Debate on Immigration, " The University of Sheffield, News Archive, December 14, 2015, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/aylan-kurdi-social-media-report-1.533951.

policies[57] when hundreds of people drowned in the Mediterranean before Alan Kurdi? This question leads back to 'identity' – the explanatory factor of concern in this chapter. Earlier reports about the deadly Mediterranean route depicted the people using it as one faceless, anonymous mass evoking little or no sympathy in the viewer. In contrast to that the picture of the lonely, small and helpless Alan Kurdi resulted in empathy and the urge to help. News outlets across the political spectrum were united in shock and the deaths in the Mediterranean got a face everyone could sympathize with – the ideal victim that would have deserved protection.

Pictures of small groups or single individuals where the faces of the depicted persons are visible result in greater empathy and the beholder can acknowledge the feelings of the ones depicted explained by what social psychology calls the 'identifiable victim effect' [58]. Conversely, showing bigger groups dehumanizes the individuals and in the context of migration reinforces existing prejudices and contributes to the impression of a threatening mass. This subtle but effective framing of refugees through certain images influenced the discourse about immigration in 2015 and fits the overall trend of anonymizing the arriving migrants.

The problem in the coverage of reputable media outlets is not obviously expressed racism but the failure in providing the audience with nuanced unbiased information about the identity of the refugees. A great share of articles mentions their country of origin while other information such as their profession, age or gender are neglected. The reports show that little voice is given to the refugees, their names are mentioned rarely, instead, it is spoken *about* them mostly by politicians and to a smaller extent by civil society. This lack of individual

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[57] Manos Tsakiris, "Refugees in the Media: How the Most Commonly Used Images Make Viewers Dehumanise Them," *The Conversation*, November 19, 2021, http://theconversation.com/refugees-in-the-media-how-the-most-commonly-used-images-make-viewers-dehumanise-them-171865.

[58] Ruben T. Azevedo et al., "When the Lens Is Too Wide: The Political Consequences of the Visual Dehumanization of Refugees," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8, no. 1 (December 2021), 1-15, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00786-x.

characteristics reinforces the image of an unfamiliar, unskilled mass consisting of predominantly men from far away countries giving no room to identify with the refugees[59].

Statements by EU officials show that the perceived deservingness and assigned victimhood of refugees is likely to be set against criminal actions as statements. Dimitris Avramopoulos who was the EU Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs in 2015 is an illustrative example. When speaking about "migratory inflows" he differentiates between "[p]eople who have the right to claim asylum" and "those who abuse the asylum system or come illegally without a valid right to stay"[60]. In a joint statement it is being highlighted that "asylum seekers in clear need of international protection" will receive it but "those who have no justified claim should be quickly identified and returned to their home country"[61].

The statements present two categories of migrants: "those who are genuinely in need of protection"[62] and "irregular migrants" with "abusive asylum claims"[63]. Another frequently used juxtaposition that lacks attention in academic research is that of "innocent victims" who are being exploited by "criminal networks"[64]. Whenever addressing the "tragic events" – meaning the drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean – Commissioner Avramopoulos links those deaths to smugglers who "exploit and often condemn to death innocent human beings". The victimization of refugees and highlighting their innocence is not to evoke empathy, it serves the purpose to shed light on "armed criminals" and to declare Europe's "war on

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[59] Georgiou and Zaborowski, "Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," 11; Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries," 7.
[60] "Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos after his visit to Budapest," European Commission, Press corner, June 30, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_15_5283.
[61] "European Commission makes progress on Agenda on Migration," European Commission, Press corner, May 27, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_15_5039.
[62] "Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the press conference in Castille Place, Malta," European Commission, Press corner, April 23, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_15_4840.
[63] "Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos after his visit to Budapest," European Commission, Press corner, June 30, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_15_5283
[64] "Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the press conference in Castille Place, Malta," European Commission, Press corner, April 23, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_15_4840.

smugglers" [65] . This justifies the increased securitization of European borders and discriminatory border practices – an argument made by authors quoted in Chapter 1. The whole rhetoric reinforces the impression that migrants always have something to do with crime – either as victims or as perpetrators.

2.2 The framing of refugees' identities in 2022

The prototype article about Ukrainian refugees tells the story of one or more individuals including their names and gives details about how long their journey took, from which part of Ukraine they fled, who they left behind and what their life was like before the war. People portrayed are usually women fleeing with their children and elderly people or the article explicitly mentions that the refugees are predominantly families, elderly people or mothers traveling alone with their children. Besides the voices of the refugees the article includes quotes by local politicians and volunteers often to express solidarity or to highlight that many refugees have private accommodation with relatives or friends or do not intend to stay for long. The tone ranges from neutral providing facts to very emotionally touching especially when the refugees are quoted and when the suffering of children is described in detail. The pictures included typically show portraits of the refugees, arriving refugee families, or small groups of refugees surrounded by volunteers[66].

[65] "Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the press conference in Castille Place, Malta," European Commission, Press corner, April 23, 2015,
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_15_4840.

[66] For example: Gregor Schwung, "Ukraine: Die nächste Flüchtlingskrise. Wie soll Deutschland das schaffen?," (Ukraine: The next refugee crisis. How can Germany handle this?) *DIE WELT*, March 8, 2022,
https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article237399495/Ukraine-Die-naechste-Fluechtlingskrise-Wie-soll-Deutschland-das-schaffen.html; Andrea Schlaier and Catherine Hoffmann, "Hilfe für Ukraine-Geflüchtete in München: 'Jeden Tag 1000 neue Plätze,'" (Help for Ukraine-refugees in Munich: 'Everyday 100 new places'),
Süddeutsche Zeitung, March 13, 2022, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/muenchen-hauptbahnhof-ukraine-fluechtlinge-ankunft-1.5546463; "Hotel Closes to Tourists to Offer Sanctuary to Ukrainian Refugees,"
BBC News, May 24, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-somerset-61550399; Peter Bierl, "Regierung macht 'Ankerzentrum' für Geflüchtete aus der Ukraine frei," (Government cleas 'arrival centre' for refugees from Ukraine), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 7, 2022,
https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/fuerstenfeldbruck/fuerstenfeldbruck-ukraine-gefluechtete-jemen-afghanistan-ankerzentrum-1.5543105.

The fact that most of the refugees are women, children, or elderly people – perceived as vulnerable groups – is mentioned a lot but the underlying gender norms gained comparatively little media attention. Due to martial law in Ukraine males between 18 and 60 cannot leave the country thus keeping them from fleeing. In a previous paper[67] I argue that dominant gender norms intensify during wartimes and assign women to the group of vulnerable victims in need of protection while men are potential combatants with the duty to fight. This is apparent in the current situation where men are not only deprived of their right to seek safety, but fighting is stylized as heroism[68]. Some articles give voice to those affected by the policy and express criticism towards the gendered assessment of who deserves protection and who must stay[69]. One article in the Washington Post[70] portrays men who managed to escape in a touching and nuanced way. Their feelings after fleeing are described as relief, grief, gratefulness but also guilt – because of the many others that cannot leave or because they feel like traitors. These male Ukrainian refugees act illegally according to Ukrainian law and some of them had to pay for the services of smugglers to escape the country, in the European discourse they are not criminalized for this.

One reoccurring theme in the media is the comparison with 2015 either to describe how the experiences, resources, and structures that were built back then help in the current

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[67] Unpublished paper: Nina Rosstalnyj, "How does war exacerbate traditional gender norms and what are the consequences for civilians? The example of martial law in Ukraine," April, 2022.

[68] Andreas Kluth, "Ukraine Takes Us Into a New Heroic Age," *Bloomberg.Com*, March 19, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-19/the-heroes-of-the-war-are-extraordinary-ordinary-ukrainians-and-also-russians.

[69] For example: Clare Toeniskoetter et al., "In Ukraine, the Men Who Must Stay and Fight," *The New York Times*, Podcast, March 1, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/01/podcasts/the-daily/ukraine-russia-kyiv-civilian-military.html; Ben Hunte, "Trans People Stranded and Alone in Ukraine Following Russia's Invasion," *Vice* (blog), March 2, 2022, https://www.vice.com/en/article/akvyxz/ukraine-war-trans-people-lgbtq; Jeffrey Gettleman and Monika Pronczuk, "Ukraine's Draft Dodgers Face Guilt, Shame and Reproach," *The New York Times*, April 10, 2022, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/world/asia/ukraine-draft-dodgers.html.

[70] Chico Harlan, "In a War of Terrible Choices, These Are the Fighting-Age Men Who Left Ukraine," *Washington Post*, September 3, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/09/ukraine-men-leave/.

situation[71] or from a critical perspective bringing up the double standards[72] – the main issue

that inspired the development of this thesis. One article in the Guardian critically elaborates on

the racist media coverage at the beginning of the war with quotes by media reporters that clearly

express the distinction between 'us' including Ukrainians and 'the other' referring to earlier

refugees[73].

> They seem so like us. That is what makes it so shocking. Ukraine is a European country. Its people watch Netflix and have Instagram accounts, vote in free elections and read uncensored newspapers. War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations. (Daniel Hannan, The Telegraph, 26.02.2022)[74]

> We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives. (Phillipe Corbé on France's BFM TV, 28.02.2022)[75]

> What's compelling is, just looking at them, the way they are dressed, these are prosperous…I'm loath to use the expression… middle class people. These are not obviously refugees looking to get away from areas in the Middle East that are still in a big state of war. These are not people trying to get away from areas in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to. (Peter Dobbie, Al Jazeera English anchor)[76]

The statements stem from the very first days after the outbreak of the war when everyone was

still in shock, and it was hard to predict how the situation will develop, for how long the war

will last and how many people will flee to Europe. However, news reporters felt the need to

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[71] For example: Mateusz Mazzini, "Poland Demonized Refugees. Now It's Struggling to Integrate Them.," *Foreign Policy* (blog), March 29, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/29/poland-demonized-refugees-now-its-struggling-to-integrate-them/; Lisa Bögl, "Neuanfang in Deutschland - „Nur gesund und fit müssen die Leute sein"," (New beginning in Germany - "they only heave to be healthy and fit"), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 8, 2022, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/starnberg/ukraine-ulli-matza-gartenbau-fluechtlinge-job-arbeit-oberpfaffenhofen-1.5543579; Constanze von Bullion, "Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine: Die Lehren aus 2015," (Refguees from Ukraine: Lessons from 2015), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 7, 2022, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/meinung/fluechtlige-ukraine-krieg-deutschland-1.5543004.

[72] Peter Bierl, "Zwei Klassen von Geflüchteten," (Two ranks of refugees), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 7, 2022, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/fuerstenfeldbruck/fuerstenfeldbruck-ukraine-gefluechtete-1.5543144.

[73] Moustafa Bayoumi, "They Are 'Civilised' and 'Look like Us': The Racist Coverage of Ukraine," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2022, sec. Opinion, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/02/civilised-european-look-like-us-racist-coverage-ukraine.

[74] Daniel Hannan, "Vladimir Putin's Monstrous Invasion Is an Attack on Civilisation Itself," *The Telegraph*, February 26, 2022, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/26/vladimir-putins-monstrous-invasion-attack-civilisation/.

[75] Sara Creta [@saracreta], "'We're Not Talking Here about Syrians Fleeing the Bombing of the Syrian Regime Backed by Putin, We're Talking about Europeans Leaving in Cars That Look like Ours to Save Their Lives.' @BFMTV (Again) Https://T.Co/Ahzuwfeu1," Tweet, *Twitter*, February 28, 2022, https://twitter.com/saracreta/status/1498072636433354755.

[76] Bayoumi, "They Are 'Civilised' and 'Look like Us.'"

unsolicitedly draw comparisons between the refugees from Ukraine and other refugees. Implicitly these statements suggest that the former deserve more empathy because they are so close to 'us', they share 'our' life standards and do not just come from some war torn 'area' but from Europe.

Communication by the EU displays better inclusion – a press release from March 2nd announcing the proposal of temporary protection for those fleeing from Ukraine states that everyone fleeing, no matter what nationality, can get protection in the EU unless their country of origin is safe to travel to[77]. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen stated: "Europe stands by those in need of protection. All those fleeing Putin's bombs are welcome in Europe."[78] The announced Temporary Protection Directive provides clear guidelines on border management. Member states are asked to ease entry regulations and allow entrance for people without sufficient documents, grant free passage for customs and pets, and reduce waiting hours by opening temporary checkpoints.

In a speech on the 11th of March van der Leyen addresses the challenges Europe is facing due to the war and sanctions imposed on Russia such as rising energy prices and possible shortages in energy supply. She emphasizes the changed security architecture around Europe and calls for higher spendings on defense as well as closer cooperation with NATO. After mentioning these costly issues and measures that might cause criticism, she shifts the topic to European unity and solidarity. Van der Leyen thanks neighboring countries and European citizens for their solidarity and welcomeness towards refugees from Ukraine "[b]ecause the people of Ukraine need and deserve all our support". She continues: "[t]he Ukrainian people are showing immense courage. And a people that stands up so bravely for European values is

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[77] The question of course is what countries are deemed 'safe' and who decides that. Extraditions to Afghanistan were earlier justified by categorizing it a 'safe country of origin'.
[78] "Ukraine: Commission proposes temporary protection for people fleeing war in Ukraine and guidelines for border checks," European Commission, Press corner, March 22, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1469.

clearly part of the European family of nations."[79] These statements rank Ukrainians as brave family members who deserve the fullest backing and seem to be a reminder that the hardships are worth it and that sanctions are a necessary step. It implies that the refugees are not a burden on the contrary thanks to Ukraine's fight to defend European values they are welcome to join the Union.

2.3 A comparison of the framed identities

Comparing the narratives about Ukrainian refugees vis-à-vis other refugees arriving in 2015 suggests that usually the former are presented in an emotional way with details about individual stories while the latter are homogenized as belonging to one distant mass. With Ukraine the audience learns about the normal, relatively peaceful life someone had before February 24th until they suddenly had to leave their job and family members behind. The experiences during bombings and details of the flight are emotional parts of many articles. Often it is mentioned that the refugees are hosted by friends or family, that their final destination is in North America or that they plan to return to Ukraine as soon as possible. All this triggers strong emotions and empathy and enables the recipient to identify with the arriving people, while also subtly assuring that they are not a huge burden for the state because they are leaving soon or staying with family.

In contrast to that, previous refugees were accommodated in reception centers or camps, most of them did not have a place to go or they were not allowed to stay outside their designated place of accommodation. It was also clear that they probably intend to stay in Europe. There was news coverage telling the story of refugees, but in most of the cases no details were provided on their profession, how they perceived the conflict in their home country or where

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[79] "Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel and President Macron following the informal meeting of Heads of State or Government of 10-11 March 2022," European Commission, Press corner, March 11, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_1708.

they stopped before arriving to Europe. When the audience does not read different names, hear different stories and motives, and learn about the struggles leading to the decision to flee to Europe it is harder to develop a nuanced understanding of the topic. It nourishes the impression that refugees are all more or less the same and mixed with little knowledge about the particular context this creates fertile ground for prejudice, short-sighted predictions and populism.

How this populism looks like and how racist the prejudices are can be seen in statements of conservative politicians and in center-right news reports. The political middle an EU representatives explained the policies towards refugees through legal terms by referring to the 1951 Convention on Refugees, by highlighting the difference between economic migrants and those in 'real need of protection' or by pointing to the legal ways of entering Europe.

The EU seemed to avoid mentioning too much about the identity of the asylum seekers by referring to them as 'the displaced', 'those seeking refuge' establishing a sense of distance and neutrality. Public statements often served as a platform to bring up criminality surrounding migration either by highlighting the illegality of crossing borders and the abuse of the asylum system or by repeatedly blaming smugglers for the deaths in the Mediterranean. In fact, the EU's migration policies and the shift from Search and Rescue Operations to securitizing borders contribute to the dangers and deadliness of the sea route[80]. Moreover, Frontex the EU border agency that is active in the Mediterranean is proven to be complicit in illegal pushbacks[81].

In contrast to the carefully distanced and unemotional language used for other refugees the discourse about Ukrainians is empathetic, emotionally and refers to them as family

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[80] "Death By Rescue: The Lethal Effects Of Non-Assistance At Sea ← Forensic Architecture," accessed June 4, 2022, https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/death-by-rescue-the-lethal-effects-of-non-assistance-at-sea., OHCHR. "Lethal Disregard. Search and rescue and the protection of migrants in the central Mediterranean Sea". United Nations, December, 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/OHCHR-thematic-report-SAR-protection-at-sea.pdf.
[81] "Frontex at Fault," bellingcat.

members who deserve the fullest support. The aim is to provide them with fast support with as little complications as possible and it was specifically invoked to perform border checks fast, sensitive, and considerate towards the refugee's needs and vulnerabilities. It is being worked towards their quick and easy entrance in hosting states and fast access to social welfare, education, the job market, and health care in all EU member states.

Some of the same states insisted earlier that they and Europe as a whole, cannot take all the refugees[82]. The numbers of arriving asylum seekers were presented as a sheer unbearable and unstoppable inflow without putting them into perspective. In total 1,3 million people arrived in Europe throughout 2015, while only the first weeks of the war in Ukraine more than 5 million people were welcomed in the EU. When comparing these numbers, the argument that it is too many people to handle debunks itself.

It seems like some of the early comments by reporters expressing shock and stating that Ukrainians 'are like us' are a confession and at the same time the justification why other refugees were treated differently. Drawing parallels with the refugee crisis in 2015 was obvious but the different reception was so blatant that apparently some reports felt the need to justify why Ukrainians are different by voicing racist thoughts – consciously or unconsciously. The perception about how the thousands of Ukrainians are welcomed and comparing it with the sentiments in 2015 seemed to reveal that in retrospective the arriving refugees were not perceived as 'one of us'. It is my interpretation that all the years before, allegations of discrimination were denied and disputed but perhaps the handling of refugees from Ukraine that diverges so much from earlier policies is the catalyst disclosing that previous practices were racist. At least it provides critics with a strong argument for their claiming this.

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[82] These tendencies changed over time and differed from country to country. Often, they are not reflective of the opinion of the civil society which showed great solidarity and openness to refugees.

It is repeatedly expressed that the situation is so shocking because war was brought back to Europe[83] and that it is not anymore somethings that happens far away in the Middle East or Africa. This implies that those regions and people living there are used to war, almost as if it is something normal 'there' just not here in Europe. This can affect the perceived deservingness because besides identity, need and control are two other criteria for deservingness[84]. Need means the extent to which someone is reliant on help, control addresses the responsibility of an individual or group for being in a situation of need.

Assuming that people who fled from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria or Eritrea are used to armed conflicts and tougher living conditions probably decreases the perceived level of need while ascribing them more control over the situation. This is also reflected in the frequent references to legal entry routes by EU representatives which implies that the refugees had enough control over their situation and a set of choices at their disposal, but they decided to use illegal ways. In fact, the asylum practices are designed so that legal ways to enter are narrow and very difficult to comply with making it virtually impossible to migrate legally from countries that produced most of the refugees[85].

With this argumentation refugees are blamed for their situation leading to lower deservingness and justifying exclusionary practices. In the Ukraine context it is highlighted over and over that it is Putin's war[86] affecting innocent civilians who are not to be blamed for this conflict, which is right, but it applies just the same to other conflicts. In the context of the 'crisis' in 2015, the outcry over Alan Kurdi is an exception from the usual non-victimization

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[83] "Statement of the Heads of State or Government, Meeting in Versailles, on the Russian Military Aggression against Ukraine, 10 March 2022," Council of the EU, March 3, 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/11/statement-of-the-heads-of-state-or-government-on-the-russian-aggression-against-ukraine-10-03-2022/pdf.

[84] Oorschot, "Who Should Get What, and Why?," 36.

[85] Jan Claudius Völkel, "When Interior Ministers play diplomats," in *Fortress Europe? Challenges and Failures of Migration and Asylum Policies,* ed. Annette Jünemann, Nikolas Scherer, and Nicolas Fromm, (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-17011-0. 83-103.

[86] For example: Charles A. Kupchan, "Why Putin's War With Ukraine Is a Miscalculation," Council on Foreign Relations, February 24, 2022, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-putins-war-ukraine-miscalculation.

of refugees. He represents the purest form of innocence and serves as an ideal victim because he is helpless, weak, and inculpable. Around the time of the publication of his pictures when humanitarian actions drastically increased was perhaps the phase of the highest perceived deservingness for refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, or Iraq.

Chapter 3 – Elements of (non)proximity and their impact on perceived deservingness

This chapter looks beyond characteristics assigned to refugees as individuals and explores what other factors influence attitudes and policies towards migrants. As suggested by Frankel Pratt and LaRoche who explore the currently criticized double standards of EU migration policies, explanatory fragments can be shared history and culture, the quality of the relations to neighboring countries but also the visibility of politicians in the media[87]. These aspects can create a feeling of proximity resulting in greater empathy, solidarity, and perceived deservingness.

3.1 Elements of (non)proximity with refugees in 2015

The media reporting about the refugee influx in 2015 "paid little and scattered attention to the context of refugee and migrant plight. There was little connection between stories on new arrivals and war reporting"[88]. This resulted in a deficient representation of migration not providing enough information for the public to develop a nuanced understanding of refugee movements and the root causes of it. The report for the UNHCR shows that more than half of the newspaper articles across the five analyzed countries do not contain information about the causes of migration. News reporting in Britain is an exception to this and provides reasons more often but it also has a higher percentage of citing economic considerations – a so-called pull factor - which nurtures prejudice about the immigrants taking advantage of welfare states[89]. In Sweden, a country that received a high number of refugees, 44.6% of the analyzed articles mention reasons for migration, overwhelmingly so-called push factors such as war, terrorism, or repressive regimes in the countries of origin. Pull-factors are rarely brought up

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[87] Frankel Pratt and LaRoche, "Ukraine's Refugees Are Close Enough for European Solidarity."

[88] Georgiou and Zaborowski, "Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," 3.

[89] Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries," 44.

and the authors did not find any article that suggested migrants are primarily coming lured by the living conditions in Europe[90]. The research finds that Swedish coverage generally chooses a more empathetic approach encouraging its readers to sympathize with the refugees and even hinting at shared feelings:

> What is happening globally affects us all. Terrorist organisation IS hunts fleeing families, children who get kidnapped by Boko Haram, repressive states who persecute journalists. These are actions which awaken disgust against the perpetrators, but also empathy to those affected... Think about if it was our children that heard the grenades during the night. Many in Sweden bear memories of repression that are now awakened again. (A Dagens Nyheter, 19.02.2015)[91]

Another statement aiming at feelings of solidarity and seeking to gain European support for refugees through the reference to history comes from Jean-Claude Juncker who was the President of the European Commission in 2015:

> We Europeans should remember well that Europe is a continent where nearly everyone has at one time been a refugee. Our common history is marked by millions of Europeans fleeing from religious or political persecution, from war, dictatorship, or oppression. (Jean-Claud Juncker, 09.09.2015)

These calls to reflect on 'our' feelings and 'our' history to better understand the motivations and needs of refugees can possibly create a feeling of closeness. They highlight the commonalities between Europeans and those seeking refuge in Europe by addressing universal phenomena such as parental care and collective memory. However, this form of emotionally engaging language to evoke sympathy with the refugees is the exception. The more common argumentative pattern when bringing up emotions or emotional events is to express feelings and then use them to focus inwards:

> With the recent tragic events in the Mediterranean, we have witnessed that the management of external borders has increasingly become a shared responsibility. (Dimitris Avramopoulos, 21.05.2015)

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[90] Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, 137.
[91] Cited in: Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, 136.

> The countries of the Visegrad Group express profound sadness over the loss of lives of thousands of people in the context of the current migration situation in Europe. They underline that migration flows present a complex and serious challenge for the EU and its Member States. (Joint Statement Visegrad Group, 04.09.2015)[92]

These statements acknowledge the 'crisis' and its human toll as something emotional but not to evoke empathy and solidarity with the refugees but to direct these feelings towards the Member States and increase understanding for their dismissive attitude. Solidarity is generally a frequently used buzzword when speaking about migration. The solidarity however is not dedicated to the refugees but to Member States that are most affected by the migration flow and serves as the justification for all sorts of disputable decisions: when proposing stricter border controls and deportations[93], when announcing 2.4 billion Euros to be spent on migration management[94] or when justifying the temporal closing of Schengen borders[95]. Bringing up feelings and solidarity serves to campaign for joint action and unity within the Union and less to induce solidarity or create closeness with the asylum-seekers.

Besides the communication from officials and the media discourse, another source of information gains growing importance in influencing public opinion: social media. Over the last decade social media platforms increasingly contributed to the framing of conflicts by providing easily accessible information for a broad public and shaping opinions inside and outside the affected country[96]. In Syria for example videos posted on platforms like YouTube were instrumental in informing the world about the violent oppression of protestors and large-scale human rights abuses since 2011 because foreign journalists were banned from entering

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[92] "State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity Place, Malta," European Commission, Press corner, September 9, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_15_5614.
[93] "Statement by First Vice-President Frans Timmermans and Migration and Home Affairs Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos," European Commission, Press corner, August 27, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_15_5544.
[94] "Managing migration and financing a safer and more secure Europe: €2.4 billion to support Member States," European Commission, Press corner, August 10, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_15_5483.
[95] "European Commission Statement following the temporary reintroduction of border controls by Germany, particularly at the German-Austrian border," European Commission, Press corner, September 13, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_15_5638.
[96] Mareike Meis, "When Is a Conflict a Crisis? On the Aesthetics of the Syrian Civil War in a Social Media Context," *Media, War & Conflict* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2017): 70, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635216653903.

the country. Several amateur videos recorded with mobile phones provided the world with footage of the brutal violence against civilians. The often shaky and pixelated videos capturing shootings or clashes between protestors and civilians "bear a special closeness and immediacy that is one reason for their tremendous impact on public discourse"[97]. The wide coverage created awareness about the situation in Syria but there is no evidence that it significantly influenced how refugees were perceived by Europeans.

Research about the influence of social media on attitudes towards refugees is still underdeveloped but existing studies suggest that the impact is likely to be negative[98]. There are exceptions like the pictures of Alan Kurdi that were shared on social media platforms hundredfold and temporary influenced the perception of refugees and the willingness to help them positively.

Findings from a study conducted in Turkey investigating how social media influenced attitudes towards Syrian refugees show that negative views are likely to be intensified[99]. The author, Çiğdem Bozdağ, with a research focus on media and migration finds that the online platforms fostered the discussion about the deservingness of certain rights for the migrants and detects the tendency to favor denying them rights. Due to the higher prevalence of hate speech and disinformation on social media where everyone can express their (uninformed) opinion with almost no restrictions social media use seems to contribute to a distancing from refugees. Exchanging radical and racist views with the community confirms the opinion of the user and helps reproduce prejudice on a large scale, according to the limited existing research[100].

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[97] Meis, 70.

[98] Dorothee Arlt and Jens Wolling, "The Refugees: Threatening or Beneficial? Exploring the Effects of Positive and Negative Attitudes and Communication on Hostile Media Perceptions," *Global Media Journal German Edition* 6, no. 1 (2016): 18.

[99] Çiğdem Bozdağ, "Bottom-up Nationalism and Discrimination on Social Media: An Analysis of the Citizenship Debate about Refugees in Turkey," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (October 1, 2020): 725, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549419869354.

[100] Bozdağ, 724–26.

The empirics from analyzed sources like media reporting and statements from EU representatives and politicians lead to the assumption that notions of proximity played a marginal role in the discourse about refugees in 2015. Commonalities from history and reasons to sympathize with refugees were expressed but not on a wide front with a broad audience. It rather seems like Europe was harried by the situation but obliged to deal with it partially because of humanitarian reasons and its own image as a defender of human rights, less so because of an emotional connection with the refugees and their plight.

The absence of emotions, a lack of contextualization and missing information about the reasons for migration impeded the development of a nuanced understanding and sympathy for those fleeing. Solidarity was mostly demanded for 'Member states at the frontline of arrivals and used to justify actions against immigrants not to support their cause. Social media and its potential to connect people globally seem to have no positive impact on the perceived closeness between refugees and hosts.

3.2 Elements of (non)proximity with refugees in 2022

In Chapter 2, it was described how refugees from Ukraine are referred to as members of the European family, these notions of belonging to one family are used by representatives of single member states as well. Statements by politicians of Ukraine's neighboring countries highlight the closeness to each other. Mariusz Kamiński Polish Minster of the Interior stated that: "We will show solidarity and support to all our Ukrainian brothers"[101] and the Polish Chief of the Chancellery Michał Dworczyk stated that "we are in solidarity with our friends in Ukraine. We support them when they are heroically defending themselves against Russian

[101] "Minister Kamiński: We Will Show Solidarity and Support to All Our Ukrainian Brothers," Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Government Website, February 24, 2022, https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia-en/minister-kaminski-we-will-show-solidarity-and-support-to-all-our-ukrainian-brothers.

aggression."[102]. Almost every public statement or news article mentions that the refugees are fleeing from "Russian rifles"[103] or because of "Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression"[104] and that "Russia alone chose this path."[105]

These statements reflect how the war in Ukraine can be easily explained and divided into victim and offender, right and wrong, making it easy for everyone to sympathize with those fleeing and creating a sense of emotional closeness[106]. The fact that Russia is the aggressor violating the borders and contesting the sovereignty of another state unites Eastern European countries in empathy towards Ukraine but also in fear. Due to the shared history as member states of the Soviet Union or under communist rule, Russia's aggression triggers bad memories of the authoritarian past[107] and concerns about the next steps Russia might take. These countries are especially clear in condemning Russia, showing solidarity and referring to commonalities:

> Russia's anti-humanitarian military actions against Ukraine are essentially directed against the entire order of Europe and of the World. United by history and common democratic values, all parties declare to cooperate in providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees fleeing from the war. (Joint statement by the Ministers of Social Affairs of Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, 11.03.2022)[108]

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[102] "Міністр Міхал Дворчик: Ми солідарні з нашими друзями в Україні," (Minister Michael Dvorczyk: We are in solidarity with our friends in Ukraine), Polish Government Website, Information for Ukrainians, March 23, 2022, https://www.gov.pl/web/ua/22.03.23. (own translation)

[103] "Minister Kamiński."

[104] "Statement of the Heads of State or Government, Meeting in Versailles, on the Russian Military Aggression against Ukraine, 10 March 2022."

[105] Auswärtiges Amt, (Foreign Ministry) "Statement von Außenministerin Baerbock im Anschluss an die Sitzung des Krisenstabes der Bundesregierung im Auswärtigen Amt zum russischen Angriff auf die Ukraine," (Statement by Foreign Minister Baerbock after the crisis committe meeting of the Bundestag in the foreign ministry regarding the attack on Ukraine), Auswärtiges Amt, February 24, 2022, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/baerbock-ukraine/2513392.

[106] Frankel Pratt and LaRoche, "Ukraine's Refugees Are Close Enough for European Solidarity."

[107] Karolina Wigura and Jarosław Kuisz, "From Eastern Europe We Watch Ukraine in Fear. Its Fate Could Decide the Continent's Future," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2022, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2022/feb/01/eastern-europe-ukraine-fear-russia-cold-war.

[108] "Joint Statement," Ministers of Social Affairs of Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, March 11, 2022, https://www.gov.pl/attachment/4181eeff-e13b-4b4c-abb3-b98115a83847.

The invasion of Ukraine poses questions about the safety of other states in the region uniting them emotionally with each other but also with Ukraine and its people. Poland is a striking example of this reaction because it has a convoluted, at times belligerent history with Ukraine. But since Russia started with acts of aggression against Ukraine in 2014 this changed, and Poland is now one of the strongest allies of Ukraine because facing Russia as an enemy connects them across other disagreements[109]. The proximity between Poland and Ukraine is constituted by interwoven history, cultural and linguistic ties, and a 535 kilometer long shared border. Most importantly for the refugee movement is probably that Ukrainians were one of the biggest minorities in Poland before the war and both peoples had friends and family on the other side of the border, Ukrainians were no strangers to Poles[110].

It is not only the Eastern European countries expressing their concerns about Russia's aggression and raising the question what it might mean for their future. Speeches given by politicians and EU representatives across the Union state that the attacks against Ukraine are considered an attack against the whole of Europe:

> Putin's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all the principles we hold dear. It is an attack on democracies, on national sovereignty, on the freedom of peoples to choose their fate and to shape their future. Our response today to Russia's heinous attack on Ukraine will as much determine Ukraine's future as it will the future of the Union and beyond the European continent. (Ursula van der Leyen, President of the European Commission, 11.03.2022)[111]

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[109] Nikolas Kozloff, "The Russian Invasion Has United Poland and Ukraine, Two Countries with a Fractious History," *New Eastern Europe* - A bimonthly news magazine dedicated to Central and Eastern European affairs, May 27, 2022, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/05/27/the-russian-invasion-has-united-poland-and-ukraine-two-countries-with-a-fractious-history/.

[110] Marta Jaroszewicz, "Migration from Ukraine to Poland, The trend stabilises, " Center for Eastern Studies, October, 2018.

[111] "Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel and President Macron following the informal meeting of Heads of State or Government of 10-11 March 2022," European Commission, Press corner, March 11, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_1708.

> The bombs, rockets and shells falling on Ukrainian cities are falling on every city in Europe. We share the pain of the thousands of people who have been killed and the millions who have fled. We are all at war. We are fighting against the aggressor and for international law, peace and goodwill. We are fighting for Ukraine. (Alar Karis, President of Estonia, 16.03.2022)[112]

These statements express not only that Russia is clearly the aggressor, but they emphasize that it is much more than a war against Ukraine. It is considered a war against ideals and core values the EU claims for itself such as peace, freedom, and democracy. The shared feeling of being threatened by Russia and the urge to defend European values creates unity and a greater willingness to help those affected by the war. Ukraine's known aspiration to be part of the European Union is addressed as well and is now seemingly welcomed much more than before the war. The country is not only geographically close to the EU by sharing borders with Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, the war fueled the ideational closeness and the feeling of being one community of values.

One other aspect potentially creating a feeling of proximity to the war in Ukraine and those affected by it is social media and live streaming. As elaborated in the previous subchapter, online platforms have an increased importance for shaping the discourse about war and influencing how users feel about it. Even though the meaning of social media already became noticeable in previous conflicts, The Washington Post calls the war in Ukraine "the most Internet-accessible war in history"[113]. Two aspects of this great accessibility are of importance for this analysis: online representation of Ukrainians on social media and the presence of president Volodymyr Zelensky.

Videos and memes from Ukraine appearing on platforms like Instagram, TikTok or Telegram generated views all around Europe, some of the content turned into popular slogans

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[112] Alar Karis, "President Alar Karis: We Are All at War," *Estonian World* (blog), March 16, 2022, https://estonianworld.com/opinion/president-alar-karis-we-are-all-at-war/.
[113] Drew Harwell and Rachel Lerman, "How Ukrainians Have Used Social Media to Humiliate the Russians and Rally the World," *Washington Post*, January 3, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/01/social-media-ukraine-russia/.

that were first used on solidarity demonstrations but are now even available as prints on T-Shirts[114]. The viewers could watch how a farmer tows a Russian tank with a tractor[115] and read about the different ways the population sabotaged the Russian army, for example by painting over road signs. Other videos showed the mass destruction in towns or how citizens try to block tanks with their bare hands. These pictures are powerful because they support the image of Ukraine's bravery while also showing a very human side of the conflict and how civilians try to deal with it often in a humorous way. This evokes sympathy and enables the international social media users to identify with the people of Ukraine and feel connected with them. An U.S. expert on urban warfare commenting war on the internet was quoted expressing exactly this feeling of closeness: "This is kind of the new way of warfare. […] We're all with Ukraine right now."[116]

The people in Ukraine manage to present themselves in a way that creates support with the international users of different social media platforms, but their president Volodymyr Zelensky mastered using digital tools in his favor. He was a remote speaker in various parliaments around the world joining politicians and diplomats from his bunker in Kyiv. According to an article in the Washington Post his address to the leaders of the European Union on an emergency summit influenced their decision about imposing even harder sanctions on Russia because his speech was so emotional[117]. Apparently Zelensky successfully touched upon the feelings of us all being one European family and highlighted Ukraine's role as a defender of European values boosting his request for greater support through humanitarian and military means as well as sanctions. In his speeches Zelensky knows how to reach the targeted

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[114] Amazon shop, accessed June 4, 2022, https://www.amazon.de/Russian-Warship-Go-Yourself-T-Shirt/dp/B09TG4HKWQ.

[115] "Ukrainian farmer fights back Putin's aggression; Tows away Russian tank with his tractor," YouTube video, Hindustan Times, March 2, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGrwSb2J_qo.

[116] Harwell and Lerman, "How Ukrainians Have Used Social Media to Humiliate the Russians and Rally the World."

[117] David J. Lynch et al., "Historic Sanctions on Russia Had Roots in Emotional Appeal from Zelensky," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/27/russia-ukraine-sanctions-swift-central-bank/.

audience and probably has a significant role in how much solidarity Ukraine and eventually also refugees from Ukraine receive.

3.3 A comparison of (non)proximity in 2015 and in 2022

The comparison of the media coverage in 2015 and in 2022 shows that reporting about previous migration flows often lacked nuances and did not provide enough context about the reasons for people fleeing. With refugees from Ukraine the context is perfectly clear and there is no doubt about who the aggressor is, therefore, it is easy to rally behind the innocent victim in this war – Ukraine and its people. Not only does Russia's military superiority make Ukraine an ideal victim – it is inculpable, weaker and facing a greater perpetrator – but the state also represents a well-known common enemy to the world. In this conflict the fronts are clear and everyone in Europe wants to be on the right side, which includes taking refugees and supporting the people fleeing as much as possible. This eagerness to open the borders for refugees is not only rooted in humanitarian convictions but it is also a statement of unity against Russia. Other conflicts producing refugees are not as present in the European media or the migration flows are not linked clearly enough to these conflicts resulting in fewer emotional reactions.

Political statements addressing both migration inflows highlight the importance of solidarity during these times of crisis but who the recipients of this virtue are and why it is mentioned highlights the contrasting treatment of refugees in the analyzed cases. In 2015 the European Union declared solidarity within its alliance and Member States critical of migration demanded it, closing borders for people that are seeking refuge and stricter migration policies were justified with the obligation to be solidary. In 2022 the recipients of solidarity are those fleeing, and it is invoked to maintain support for measures that pose great hardships to the EU and its member states. This application of solidarity to diverging actors and measures – in 2015 to Member States and rejecting policies, in 2022 to the refugees and supportive policies –

makes it seem like solidarity is invoked arbitrarily and serves only as a rhetorical instrument or smokescreen to sell potentially unpopular policies.

Another rhetorical pattern that stands out when comparing speeches about refugees in 2015 and today is the framing of the situation as a crisis and how this influences the perception of refugees. In 2015 the migration was the crisis, arriving refugees were the main problem and all discussions revolved around how to deal with these people. In the current context, however, the people fleeing from Ukraine are not the crisis, they are a small symptom of a much bigger crisis produced by Russia. By connecting the refugees to a war that goes beyond the borders of the attacked country, the refugees themselves turn into one minor problem. Europe takes Russia's move personally and perceives it as an attack against its core values which makes the issue of mass migration appear very small compared to the new confrontation with Russia. In 2015 the spreading authoritarianism, large-scale human rights abuses, oppressive regimes waging wars against their own civilians or climate change displacing people were not recognized as the underlying crisis causing people to flee.

Another difference seems to be how social media platforms influence the perceived closeness between refugees and international users. In 2015 examples of the Syrian context indicate that platforms where opinions and visual material are shared are an important tool for journalists and regular users to access information, but they are too a source of hatred and disinformation potentially increasing negative attitudes rather than building connections. In the Ukrainian context users can follow the war live from everywhere, share their solidarity and connect with refugees or volunteering groups. Videos representing Ukrainians and their president as brave and fierce warriors for European values and stories conveying humanity, emotions, and humor evoke sympathy and feelings of closeness. These differences might be due to the intensified presence of social media in the everyday life of users today compared

with 2015. The "Digital 2022 Global Overview Report"[118] and the same report from 2016[119] show that the number of active social media accounts in Western Europe almost doubled over the years and the average time spent on social media daily increases every year. The fact that the traffic on online platforms rose drastically since the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 might have an impact on the perceived closeness created through the use and exchange on social media.

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[118] Free access to slides: "Digital 2022 Report zur Entwicklung der globalen Nutzung von Internet, Social Media und Mobile," (Digital 2022 report on the development of global use of internet, social media and mobile), February 15, 2022, slide 90 and 96, https://www.mcschindler.com/digital-2022-report-zur-entwicklung-der-globalen-nutzung-von-internet-social-media-und-mobile/.
[119] Free access to slides: "Digital in 2016: 15 Fakten zur globalen Nutzung von digital, social & mobile," (Digital in 2016: 15 facts on global use of digital, social & mobile), February 7, 2016, slide 32 and 37, https://www.mcschindler.com/digital-in-2016-15-fakten-zur-globalen-nutzung-von-digital-social-mobile/.

Conclusion

This research explored what the underlying factors are that lead to double standards regarding migration policies the EU is being accused of. The argument builds on the concept of deservingness and examines how it is applied to different groups of refugees by comparing the discourse about migration in 2015 and 2022. The analysis of media coverage and statements by politicians shows that the representation of the refugees' identities is influenced by their gender, race, education, and age. Highlighting these characteristics or omitting them influences their perceived deservingness. Shared history, clarity about the context of the flight, and feeling (dis)connected through social media constitute elements of proximity indirectly informing the level of perceived deservingness.

I conclude that it is not one single characteristic of refugees that causes discriminatory practices but rather a combination of factors such as the ability to identify and sympathize with the refugees depending on the information provided by the media, the perceived level of victimhood, an understanding of reasons to flee, geographical proximity, and (social) media representation. These factors work in favor of refugees from Ukraine in 2022 and are rather disadvantageous for refugees who arrived in 2015.

This research contributes to a growing number of critical assessments of EU migration policies while including the unique, new case of refugees from Ukraine. The discourse and policies concerning them are still developing and provide scholars with a variety of questions to research. It would be interesting to examine if the unprecedented willingness to welcome refugees and the positive discourse highlighting solidarity will turn into securitization as it happened with previous migration movements. The impact social media usage has on the perception of refugees needs further research to better understand the attitudes towards migration within society.

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