

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, THE CRISIS IN EUROPE AND THE FUTURE OF POLICY

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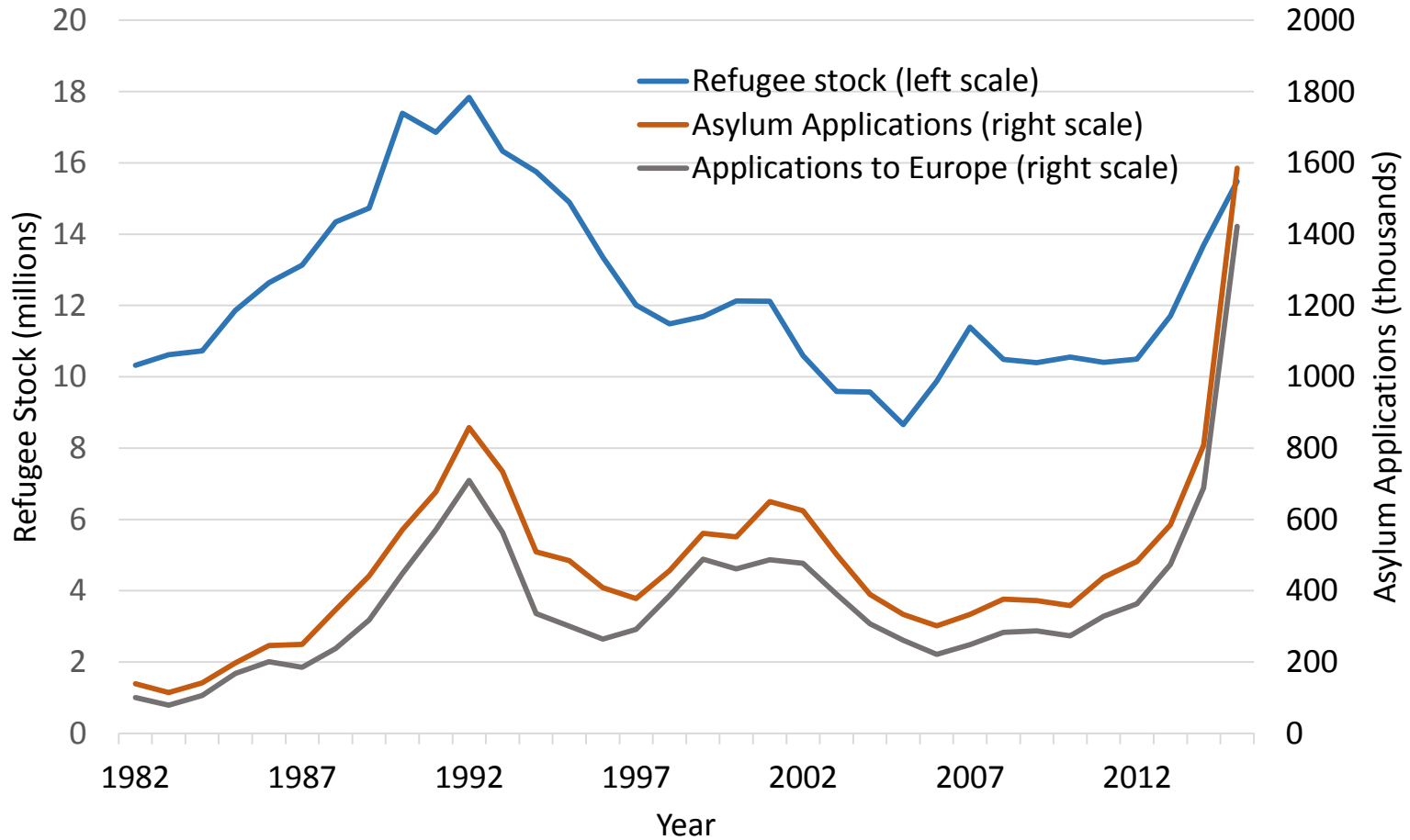
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Introduction

- The recent European migration crisis threw the existing asylum system into chaos and has led to an increasingly polarised debate about reform. I first examine some relevant facts and findings, and then turn to policy.
- Trends in refugees and asylum numbers and outcomes.
- The determinants of asylum applications.
- The public opinion and the political economy of asylum policy.
- I focus on three key issues for reform: border control, resettlement, and burden-sharing between EU countries.
- In this light, I argue that the current system is inefficient and fails to help those most in need. It should be replaced by a substantial resettlement programme.

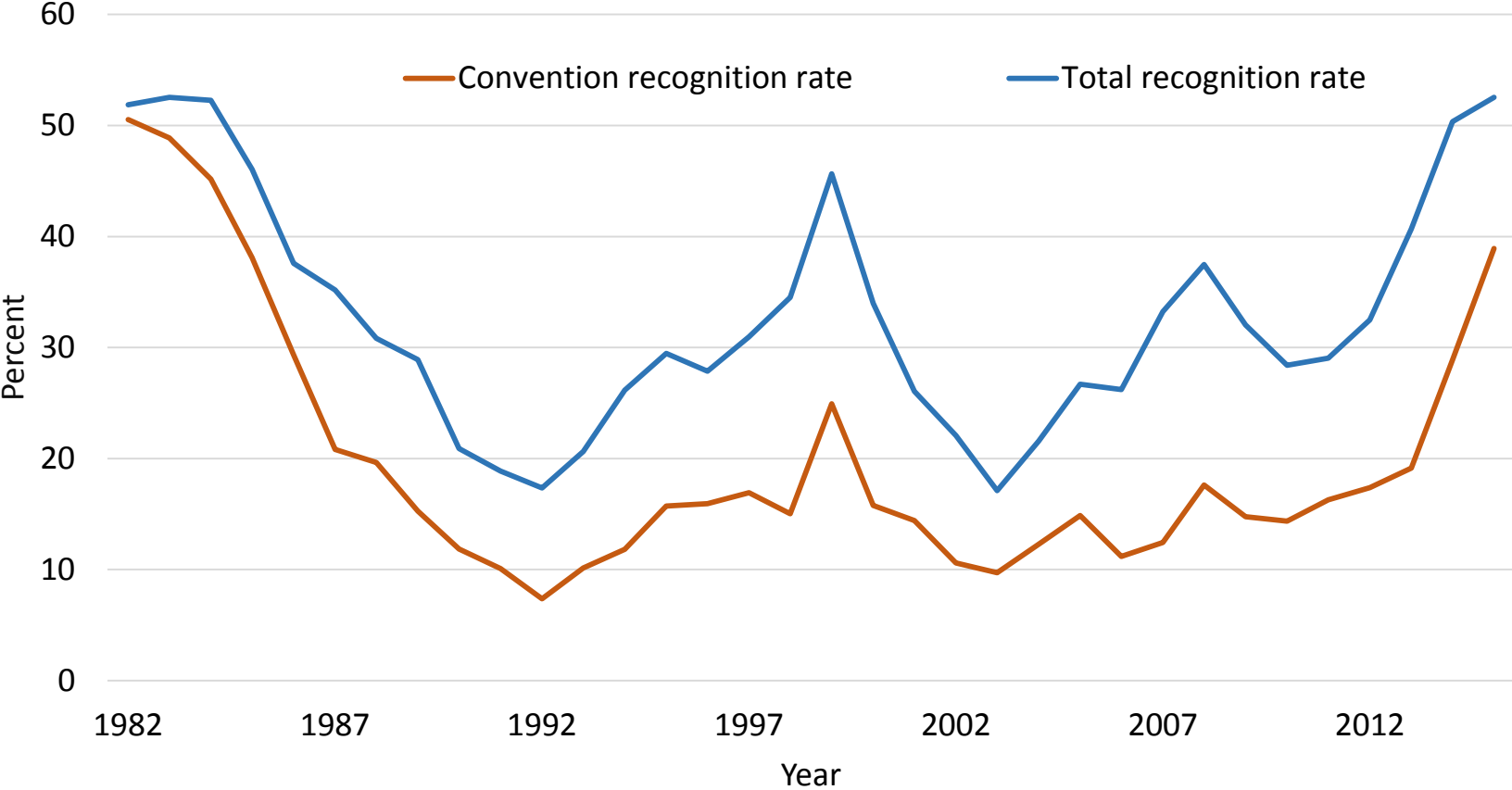
Refugees and Asylum Seekers



Asylum Applications

- Asylum seekers increasingly gain unauthorised entry in order to get access to an uncertain prospect of receiving asylum.
- In 2015 1.8m crossed the Mediterranean and the Aegean.
- This rekindled the debate about genuine refugees versus economic migrants.
- On one hand most asylum applicants come from countries embroiled in war and human rights abuse, led by Syria, Afghanistan, Serbia, Iraq and Pakistan.
- On the other hand (until very recently) more than half of applications for asylum are rejected.

Recognition rates: 20 European countries



Determinants of Asylum Applications

- Applications to 19 countries (EU-14, Switzerland, Norway, US, Canada, Australia) from 48 strife-prone origins, 1997-2014.
- Results from regressions with origin-destination dyad fixed effects:
- Terror and human rights abuse are the most important drivers, particularly the Political Terror Scale and the Freedom House index of civil liberties.
- There is also some evidence an upward trend in applications. This is largely driven by the years since 2011 and is associated with the increasing importance of civil wars.

Determinants of Applications (contd.)

- Origin country GDP per capita is negatively related to applications. So economic imperatives matter: a ten percent increase in origin GDP per capita reduces applications by about five percent.
- Not surprisingly, the pre-existing stock of immigrants from the origin country is very strong.
- Asylum flows are negatively related to distance between origin and destination, even in the presence of the stock.
- There are also some destination country effects. Higher unemployment reduces applications a little.

Effects of asylum policies

- Destination country conditions matter, particularly asylum policies. I use a 15-component policy index.
- Policies aimed at limiting access to the country's territory, (border controls, visa restrictions, carrier sanctions etc.) have strong deterrent effects.
- Tougher policies on determining refugee status (definition of a refugee, defining some claims as 'manifestly unfounded' etc.) also have strong deterrent effects.
- Policies towards asylum-seeker welfare (welfare benefits; dispersal, detention etc.) have no effect.
- It is the chance of gaining permanent settlement that drives asylum applications despite the hardships that this involves.

Predicted effects on asylum applications

(percentage change in annual applications)

	1997-2005	2005-2014		1997-2005	2005-2014
Australia	-48.6	-18.5	Italy	-28.3	20.0
Austria	-42.3	-10.9	Netherlands	-48.6	-10.9
Belgium	-14.8	-20.5	Norway	-32.3	-20.5
Canada	-18.2	-32.3	Poland	-14.8	-14.8
Czech Rep.	-4.4	-10.9	Spain	-29.4	-12.7
Denmark	-39.6	0.0	Sweden	0.0	73.3
France	-27.4	17.4	Switzerland	-29.2	-38.3
Germany	-7.1	2.9	UK	-59.1	-19.5
Hungary	0.0	-10.9	USA	-27.4	-21.3
Ireland	-42.3	0.0	Total	-28.7	-1.1

Opinion in the European Social Survey

- When setting asylum policy politicians must heed the opinions of the people that elect them.
- Here I look at 18 countries in the ESS in 2002 and 2014.
- These are the relevant questions:
- “To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of a different race or ethnic group as most [country] people to come and live here?” (many/some/a few/none).
- “How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe?” (many/some/a few/ none).
- “Government should be generous judging applications for refugee status” (strongly agree/agree/neither/disagree/strongly disagree).

Opinion on immigrants and refugees

(percent against)

	Different ethnic group		From poor countries		Be generous to refugees	
	2014	Change	2014	Change	2014	Change
Austria	49.0	-17.3	55.9	-9.0	36.8	-6.1
Belgium	41.2	-3.6	47.6	3.9	44.4	-15.1
Czech Rep.	72.3	19.2	72.4	23.6	44.5	-18.2
Denmark	38.7	-12.8	55.2	1.4	29.0	-21.2
Finland	53.1	-9.5	64.8	4.8	21.8	-11.3
France	38.3	-7.1	48.0	-0.9	18.0	-0.3
Germany	23.4	-18.7	33.7	-7.2	32.4	-26.9
Hungary	80.7	-5.5	87.3	-0.7	39.0	-25.8
Ireland	47.4	12.4	57.3	21.2	20.9	0.0
Netherlands	32.7	-9.5	46.7	2.8	47.0	-27.9
Norway	23.5	-20.0	32.0	-6.4	18.4	-27.8
Poland	42.7	-2.6	47.5	4.2	8.5	-4.5
Portugal	47.2	-14.2	52.9	-9.5	7.7	-3.6
Slovenia	35.9	-7.9	47.8	4.3	24.2	-25.3
Spain	44.7	-3.6	47.5	-3.5	16.2	-2.3
Sweden	7.6	-9.3	12.6	-2.8	9.8	-13.3
Switzerland	37.1	3.5	44.5	13.2	34.9	-15.5
UK	43.2	-6.6	57.4	5.9	27.7	-19.4
Country mean	42.1	-6.3	50.6	2.5	26.7	-14.7

Changes in opinion 2002-2014

- On average opinion has become less negative towards ethnic minority immigrants and more negative to immigrants from poor countries. But it has become much less negative towards genuine refugees (by 14.7 percentage points).
- Correlation across 18 countries between change in anti-immigration opinion 2002 to 2014 and change in asylum applications per capita between 1997-2001 to 2009-2013.
- Asylum flow and opinion on 'different ethnic group': 0.36
- Asylum flow and opinion on 'poor country immig': 0.48
- Asylum flow and opinion on 'generous to refugees': -0.17

Preference versus salience

- Public opinion is not overwhelmingly negative, but there are two reasons why there is a shift against immigration/asylum.
- The first is that *salience*, as distinct from *preference*, has increased. Eurobarometer provides a measure of salience:
- “What do you think are the two most important issues facing [our country] at the moment?” (1 if immigration is chosen).
- Salience has gone up steeply: the average across 21 European countries increased from 6.9 percent in 2009 to 18.3. percent in 2015.
- Salience has the effect of magnifying preferences for or against immigration and so the debate has become more polarised.

Illegal immigration

- The second reason is that the recent migration crisis saw a steep rise in unauthorised border crossings.
- Frontex data show that unauthorised entry increased from 104,000 in 2010 to 1.82 million in 2015. In 2015 3,700 drowned; in 2016 it was 5,000.
- Public opinion is massively opposed to illegal immigration.
- In the *Transatlantic Trends* survey (6 countries) 75 percent are “worried about illegal immigration”. This has increased and is more than double the level for legal immigration.
- In Eurobarometer (2015) 87 percent of respondents favour additional measures to fight illegal immigration.

Level of decision-making

- With declining trust in the EU one might have expected that public opinion would be increasingly against having immigration and asylum policies set at the EU level.
- The evidence from Eurobarometer for the EU-27 is that support for joint European immigration policy has been rising and the country average is now 71 percent.
- 68 percent wish to see additional measures to fight illegal immigration either at the EU-level or national and EU-level.
- This suggests that the EU has a greater mandate for setting and implementing immigration and asylum policies than is often supposed.

Summary so far

- Asylum applications have been rising, with increasing numbers taking risky passages via sea and land.
- Around half of asylum claims are rejected.
- The current system encourages mixed migration for access to an uncertain prospect of gaining recognition.
- Tougher asylum policies, especially those relating to access and processing, do reduce the number of applications.
- Public opinion in Europe is increasingly favourable to genuine refugees but is strongly against illegal immigration.
- Salience has increased, with strong concerns about illegal immigration.
- There is surprisingly strong support for joint EU policy.

Policy reform

- These findings suggest the following long-term policy reforms:
- Tighten the borders to radically reduce unauthorised entry. This will allay fears about illegal immigration and the arrival of economic migrants. But it will also impact genuine refugees.
- Provide greater support for refugees in camps and in countries of first asylum. And, most important, embark on comprehensive resettlement of recognised refugees.
- Expand refugee-hosting capacity through centrally organised burden-sharing for refugees resettled directly from countries of first asylum. This should be determined at the EU level.
- Are these measures feasible?

Border control

- Tougher border controls reduce asylum applications.
- The EU experience of 2013-15 illustrates the failure to implement controls on some routes (e.g. to Greece) rather than that border controls are inherently ineffective.
- The experience in the Western Mediterranean (and in Australia) suggests that it can have a big impact on maritime routes. The collapse of Libya had the opposite effect.
- But such policies have to be fairly draconian and are more easily achieved in cooperation with transit countries.
- The recent agreement between the EU and Turkey reduced unauthorised Aegean/Balkan crossings by 97 percent.

Support for refugees

- These measures will not provide an immediate solution for most refugees, 86 percent of whom are in poor countries.
- About 30 percent of those in countries of first asylum are in refugee camps subsisting under appalling conditions, others are in shanty towns on urban fringes.
- Many have been there for decades with little prospect of local integration or return to their origin country.
- Turkey is host to 2.5 million (even after many have left). Conditions are worse in Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya and Chad.
- There is a massive shortfall of financial support for housing, health and education. Much more effort is needed.

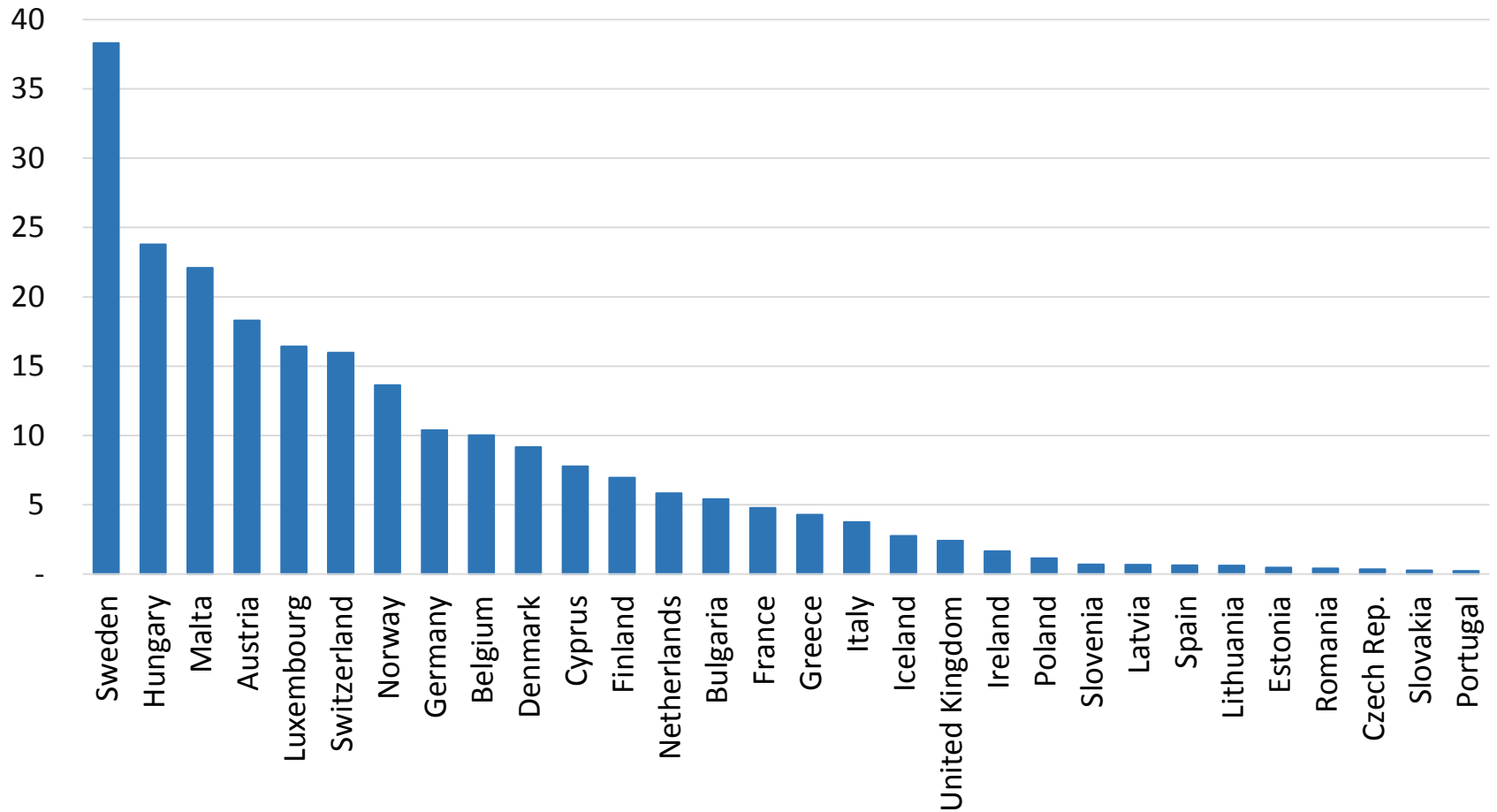
Resettlement

- If spontaneous asylum seeking is radically reduced then this should be replaced by a substantial resettlement programme.
- About 80,000 are resettled to developed countries each year but for 2017 the UNHCR identifies 1.19 million as genuine refugees in need of resettlement.
- Most go to US/Canada/Australia. 20 European countries participate but their total resettlement in 2016 was 12,500.
- In 2015 the EU 'agreed' on redistributing 160,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece. It also proposed to resettle 72,000 Syrians. But, so far, the numbers have been small.
- If resettlement was adopted in the EU on the scale of Australia's programme that would be 300,000 per year.

Burden-sharing

- Resettlement capacity in Europe needs to be increased.
- Hosting refugees satisfies humanitarian motives and can be interpreted as a public good.
- But locally provided public goods will be under-provided. The social planner would set a higher number but there is an incentive to free ride. This is why it should be EU-led.
- The Common European Asylum System has focused on policy harmonisation, not on burden sharing. This has not helped to distribute asylum applications more evenly.
- To increase total resettlement capacity it is necessary to distribute refugees more evenly.

Asylum applications in 2011-15 per 1000 population



Post-2015 developments

- Transfers from Greece and Italy have been resisted, notably by Hungary, initially and in the October 2nd 2016 plebiscite.
- But Hungary had 174,000 asylum applications in 2015, 13 times the average for 2010-14, so perhaps not so surprising.
- Resettlement of genuine refugees would be more acceptable to politicians and publics.
- The UN summit of September 19th 2016 was expected to commit to resettling 10 percent of the world's 16m refugees. The result was a "Global Compact on Responsibility Sharing for Refugees". But with details to be worked out in 2018.
- The leaders' summit on refugees committed to increased financial support and to double the number resettled. Some progress, but not enough.

Conclusion

- The existing asylum system is inefficient and badly targeted. It fails to focus on those that most need our help.
- We, in the EU, could do better by:
 - (a) tightening the borders,
 - (b) resettling vastly more of those in the greatest need, and
 - (c) expanding resettlement capacity through burden-sharing.
- Any policy needs to be politically feasible, and these measures would work *with* the grain of public opinion, not *against* it. Otherwise we risk (and are seeing) a massive backlash.
- This would be a constructive way of developing EU asylum policy in the longer term, but it is difficult to do while ‘spontaneous’ applications remain high.

Determinants of Asylum Applications

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Political terror scale	0.231*** (4.32)	0.238*** (4.32)			
Civil liberties (Freedom House)	0.249*** (4.08)	0.247*** (3.94)			
Political rights (Freedom House)	-0.030 (0.68)	-0.028 (0.62)			
Civil war battle deaths/origin popn	0.196 (0.99)	0.173 (0.81)			
Log origin country real GDP per capita	-0.619** (2.48)	-0.605** (2.32)			
Log migrant stock 2000-1/origin popn.	0.227*** (8.68)		0.228*** (8.68)	0.223*** (8.33)	0.223*** (8.33)
Log distance, source to destination	-0.827*** (4.27)		-0.819*** (4.21)	-0.790*** (4.23)	-0.790*** (4.23)
Log destination GDP per capita	-0.036 (0.07)	-0.110 (0.22)	-0.310 (0.68)	-0.354 (0.79)	-0.206 (0.43)
Unemployment rate at destination	-0.030*** (2.84)	-0.032*** (3.05)	-0.032*** (3.23)	-0.031*** (3.05)	-0.032*** (3.23)

Determinants of Asylum Applications

Policy index	-0.065*** (5.56)	-0.058*** (5.10)			
Policy on access			-0.160*** (4.98)	-0.153*** (4.81)	-0.148*** (4.68)
Policy on processing			-0.115*** (7.98)	-0.119*** (8.25)	-0.122*** (8.55)
Policy on welfare			0.041 (1.56)	0.046* (1.77)	-0.035 (1.24)
Lagged recognition rate				0.223** (2.37)	0.181** (2.00)
Readmission agreement				0.356* (1.85)	0.364* (1.89)
Lagged immigration policy					0.022** (2.12)
Fixed effects (number of FE)	Origin (48)	Orig × Dest (626)	Origin × Yr (862)	Orig × Yr (862)	Orig × Yr (862)
Dest dummies	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
R ² Within	0.414	0.130	0.416	0.419	0.420
No of Obs.	10875	10875	10875	10875	10875