

# Climate Migrants vs. Political Refugees: Unravelling Perceptions and Communication Patterns on Migration

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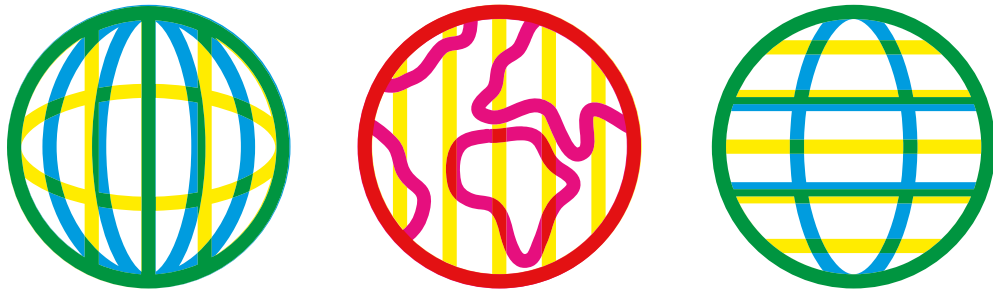
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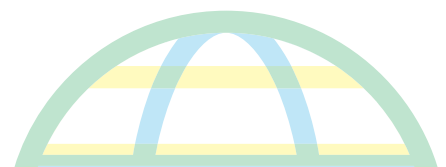


# Climate Migrants vs. Political Refugees: Unravelling Perceptions and Communication Patterns on Migration.

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# 1. Introduction

The OPPORTUNITIES project explores the relationship between migration and social cohesion, arguing that crises also present opportunities for more inclusive narratives and successful integration. The project investigates European attitudes towards migration over time. The research reveals that while about 25% of Europeans express negative attitudes towards migration, most can be categorized as **neutral or lukewarm supporters**. Attitudes differ significantly across European countries, with Central-Eastern and some other nations showing more negative views. The study finds that attitudes towards migration have remained relatively stable over the past two decades, but policy preferences shifted after the 2015-2016 crisis, with paradoxically a more welcoming attitude in some countries. Based upon secondary analysis of the European Social Survey data, OPPORTUNITIES research (*see D4.1, Trends in Attitudes towards Migration in Europe. A comparative analysis*) highlights that economic and social factors influence attitudes, with more affluent and trusting citizens being more supportive. However, there is little support for a full open border policy, and asylum applications should be carefully evaluated. In this perspective, Europeans think that **migration comes with both costs and benefits**. Most people feel that migration could increase crime levels, and would cost more in terms of taxes than migrants would bring in. However, almost half of the respondents also agreed that migration enriched their national culture. Europeans tend to be more favorable towards migrants when migrants are seen as “deserving”, e.g., when they make an effort to integrate in their country, bring in skills needed in the economy, or have a similar ethnic background. The findings also emphasize that divergence on migration will continue to be a prominent feature in European countries. These divisions imply that both at the national and European level, decision-making on migration will most likely remain challenging and divisive, as attitudes continue to diverge widely.

To further understand these attitudes, the OPPORTUNITIES project conducted an online survey in four European countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy) in 2021. The survey analyzed media consumption patterns and their correlation with outgroup attitudes (*see D4.6. Cross-country Comparison of Media Selection and Attitudes towards Narratives on Migration*). Exposure to news on public service networks (both radio and television), local television networks, quality newspapers, and quality digital news outlets is associated with positive attitudes towards immigrants, refugees, and Muslims. Based on previous findings regarding the narratives on migration on several of these media outlets, this was largely in line with our expectations. An exception here is Hungary, where exposure to public service network (or here: state media) is linked with more negative attitudes. Somewhat surprisingly, results also indicate that exposure to popular newspapers and digital news is also related to more positive attitudes among German, Hungarian, and Italian respondents. This indicates that – in some countries – the amount of media exposure in general may play a significant role in the development of outgroup attitudes, rather than the type of media that individuals are exposed to (in line with cultivation theory). The results indicate that exposure to specific media outlets and their narratives influences attitudes towards immigrants, refugees, and Muslims, highlighting the need for a **detailed analysis of news media effects on outgroup attitudes**.

In another OPPORTUNITIES study (*D4.7, The Twitter Debate on Immigration in Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Italy: Politicians’ Articulations of the Discourses of Openness and Closure*), researchers analyzed the tweets of politicians representing opposing political traditions. The main hypothesis was that traditional parties would favor a discourse of openness, while nationalist/far-right parties would favor a discourse of closure regarding migration. The analysis confirmed this divide, with word clouds

revealing distinct semantic specificities for each discourse. Right-wing parties emphasized the importance of borders and expressed concerns about Islamism and radicalization. Traditional parties focused on integration as a key concept. Safety valves were found in the discourse of both left-wing and right-wing politicians, with some acknowledging the importance of protecting minorities or speaking out against anti-Semitism. The analysis also highlighted that the opposition parties tended to use more adversarial language on Twitter. Overall, the study supported the hypothesis of a **clear divide** between the discourse of openness and the discourse of closure in European politicians' tweets, confirming that **political Twitter is no place for moderates**. The findings suggest that shaping attitudes towards out-groups will require different communication strategies from politicians.

Against this background, we further aim to explore **how people perceive climate migrants** and compare it with the perceptions of political refugees and migrants in general. By examining the current perceptions and potential future trends, we seek to understand the evolving attitudes towards climate migrants. Additionally, we will investigate the relationship between perceptions, attitudes, and communication to gain insights into the dynamics of public opinion and the potential impact of communication strategies on attitudes towards climate migrants.

The findings from this study have significant implications for both policymaking and journalism. Policymakers and journalists, depending on their contexts and motivations, can either reinforce existing perceptions, which may vary between dimensions such as world-orientation and ethnocentrism, compassion and pragmatism, social utopianism, and selfishness, or they can work towards adapting or even reversing these attitudes. However, it is crucial to recognize that reinforcing existing attitudes is relatively straightforward, while changing them can be a challenging task. Through this text, we aim to provide **guidance on potential strategies** to achieve such adaptations or reversals.





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## 2. Method

The method employed to address the aforementioned issues is known as **resonance analysis**. This approach was developed to examine the extent to which an input of information, whether it be a person, object, idea, or message, resonates with individuals' cognitive representations. It also explores the emotional intensity of these interactions and their implications for behavior. By studying these interactions, we gain insights into how individuals perceive, process, and organize information within the social context.

Resonance analysis is based on the spontaneous associations individuals make with a given issue, in this case, the terms 'migrants,' 'political refugees,' and 'climate migrants.' The spontaneous nature of their responses, obtained through a simple verbal elicitation test, serves two important purposes. Firstly, it helps us avoid question and response effects, which can introduce biases in survey results by imposing researchers' assumptions on respondents through language or predefined response options. Secondly, this associative way of answering questions taps into people's automatic thinking, a level of cognition commonly involved in consuming media messages, including political communication. Consequently, it provides a more accurate picture of how social groups are likely to perceive political and social (media) messages in their day-to-day lives.

After grouping the words or phrases used by respondents into homogeneous semantic categories, we employ a statistical technique called Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to identify concepts that are most frequently mentioned together by respondents.<sup>1</sup> We then determine the basic emotions (fear, anger, disgust, sadness, surprise, joy) associated with 'migrants,' 'political refugees,' and 'climate migrants' by locating their positions on the MCA plot. This enables us to infer the emotional charge of the identified patterns. Additionally, we incorporate socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education) and Likert scales on ethnic attitudes and feelings, as well as social distance, to understand the social and ideological groups to which our respondents belong. The assessment of people's social distance and ethical feelings is based on questions and scales on attitudes adapted from the immigration module included in the 7th round of the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2014.

Our survey, conducted by iVox in February 2023, targeted a panel of 720 respondents in the Dutch-language speaking part of Belgium, and strict quality controls were implemented to ensure high-quality results. By removing respondents who provided one or less than one category in the elicitation test, the sample size was reduced to 189 for migrants, 168 for political refugees, and 102 for climate migrants. The minimal response to the elicitation test for climate migrants suggests that the concept of climate migrants has not yet gained significant recognition in society. We will further explore this aspect in our analysis

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<sup>1</sup> The frequency curve of categories mentioned by the respondents in response to a given input generally has a tipping point, after which the number of concepts in the category rapidly declines. This tipping point is generally situated around 10% of respondents. In this analysis, it is around 8.8% (see Table 1). The categories that fall below this threshold for a given subsample are not used in the MCA because they are considered insufficiently representative as group characteristic.



## 3. Findings

### *Migrants*

The statistical analysis unveils a two-dimensional model<sup>2</sup> that illustrates the concepts most frequently associated with 'migrants.' The first dimension accounts for 24.1% of the variance, indicating the presence of an ideological tension between two distinct groups. On the right side of the MCA plot (Figure 1.1), we find individuals who predominantly associate migrants with concepts such as war, poverty, needy, compassion, understanding, fortune-seekers, and flight, listed in order of frequency. On the left side of the MCA plot, the concepts include 'strangers,' 'integration,' 'profiteers,' 'background,' 'over-many,' 'housing,' and 'unemployment.'

**Table 1: List of categories, concepts, and frequencies (in % of subsample)**

Category	Examples of concepts used	Mig.	Pol.	Clim.*
9 Strangers	strangers, from other countries, foreigners, ...	27.0	9.5	7.8
Integration	Integration, adaptation, language issues	23.8	6.5	2.0
War	war, crimes of war, dictatorship, ...	21.3	33.3	2.0
Profiteers	Profiteers, steel our work, get benefits, ...	21.2	14.9	8.8
Background	Other race, religion, culture, habits, ...	20.6	7.1	2.0
Refugees	Refugees	17.5	1.2	12.7
Overmany	too many, high numbers, overwhelming, ...	16.4	12.5	9.8
Poverty	Hunger, no money, poverty, poor people, ...	15.3	20.2	13.7
Compassion	Suffering, trauma, despair, survival, ...	12.7	28.6	8.8
Needy	Need help, need support, need houses, ...	11.6	16.7	3.9
Housing	No housing, asylum centers fall short, ...	11.1	13.7	4.9
Fortune seekers	Fortune seekers, money seekers	10.6	4.2	4.9
Unemployment	work, jobs (un)employment, ...	10.6	2.4	2.9
Understanding	Exploited, no chances, lack of protection, ...	10.1	17.9	8.8
Flight	they are fighting, flight	9.5	6.0	6.9
Asylum	Procedure, paperless, visa, ...	9.0	11.3	3.9
Misery	Misery	3.7	14.3	3.9
Climate change	Heath, extreme weather, nature changes, ...	1.1	3.0	52.2

<sup>2</sup> The distance between concepts indicates how often individuals mentioned these concepts together. The recurrence of the same association indicates the existence of a pattern shared by many respondents. The dimensions of the graph (the vertical and horizontal axes) suggest an underlying tension that distinguishes different groups of concepts. The further away from the axes, the more weight a concept has in the construction of a dimension.





Totalitarianism	repression, totalitarianism	1.1	15.5	0.0
Disaster	Storms, draughts, harvests, earthquakes, ...	0.5	1.8	46.1
NA	No, non, nothing, no idea	3.3	5.4	20.4

\* Mig. = Migrants; Pol.=Political Refugees; Clim. = Climate Migrants

The evident tension between the two sides reflects the contrasting positive and negative attitudes towards migrants. However, the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) exposes a deeper, more nuanced tension. On the left side (positive valence), we find individuals with an external focus, who strive to understand the situation in the migrants' country of origin and empathize with them as individuals. On the right side (negative valence), individuals are primarily focused on the local situation and tend to be more self-centered. This dimension can thus be interpreted as a tension between 'self-transcendence' and 'self-enhancement' values.

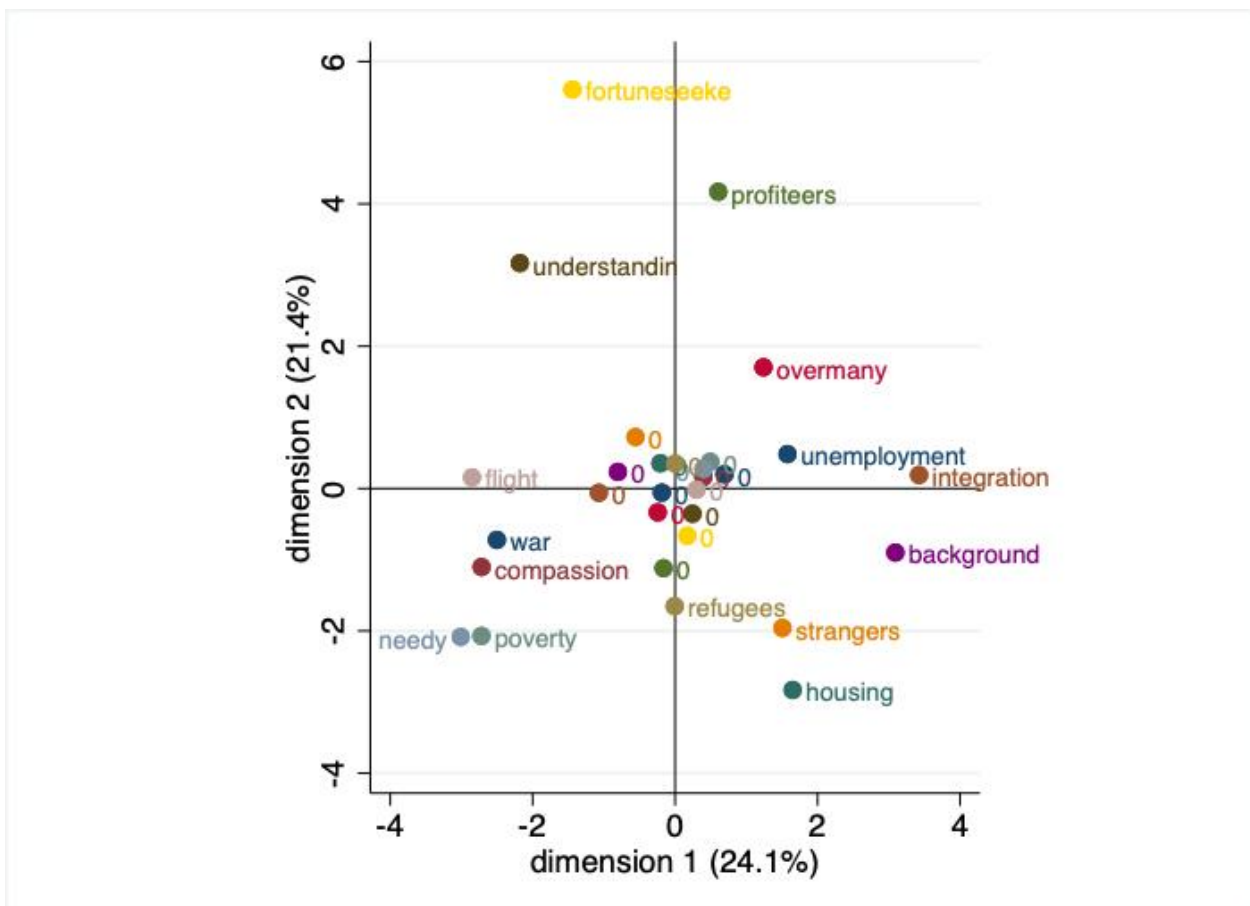
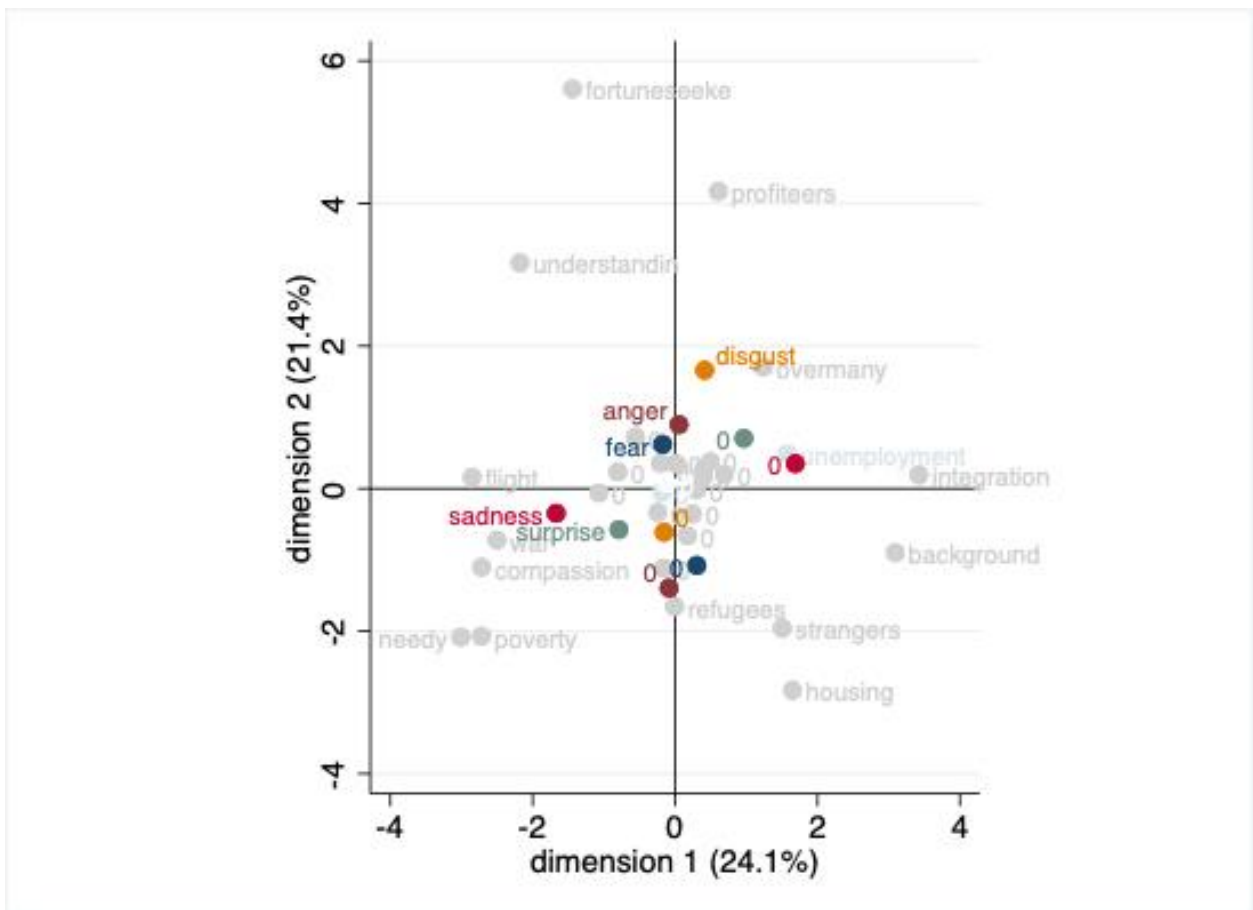


Figure 1.1. MCA plot of concepts associated with the concept of 'migrants'

The second dimension, explaining 21.4% of the variance in the group, is almost as influential as the first dimension. Its nature becomes most evident on the right-hand side of the model. In the lower right quadrant, the terms 'foreign' (referring to the migrants' foreign origin) and 'background' (relating to their

diverse ethnic, religious, or cultural background) are prominent. In the upper right quadrant, individuals are depicted as 'profiteers,' 'too many,' and 'unemployed,' in order of significance.

This second dimension can thus be characterized as a tension between a cultural perspective (bottom) and an economic perspective (top) on migrants. This tension is reinforced on the left side of the model by the inclusion of the term 'fortune-seekers' in the upper quadrant. This term ('gelukzoekers' in Dutch) was introduced by the extreme right as a euphemism for profiteers. Its appearance in the analysis confirms the success of the extreme right's rhetorical strategy but also highlights the dual mindset of respondents in this quadrant: they are partly motivated by self-transcendent values, yet they also experience economic concerns and threats.



**Figure 1.2. MCA plot of migrants with emotions added as secondary variables**

The role of threat in understanding this dimension is further highlighted by the addition of emotions to the MCA plot (Figure 2.1). This plot reveals that individuals who predominantly adopt a cultural perspective on migrants do not express feelings of fear or anger. On the other hand, those who experience economic threat are more likely to associate migrants with emotions related to fear (reported by 63.5% of respondents) and anger (reported by 60.8% of respondents). Furthermore, individuals who combine an economic and self-enhancement perspective (upper right quadrant) on migrants frequently report feelings of disgust (expressed by 27% of respondents). In contrast, emotions related to sadness





### Political refugees

The resonance analysis conducted earlier on the term 'migrants' serves as a useful framework for interpreting the MCA plot of political refugees. However, notable differences emerge at both the level of associated concepts and the underlying dimensions. Let us begin with the latter. As a reminder, the respondents on the left-hand side of the MCA plot are those most aligned with self-transcendent values.

Within the lower left quadrant, the concept of 'compassion' (28.6%) stands out prominently. It is mentioned over twice as frequently as 'migrants' and more than three times as often as 'climate migrants' (as shown later). The concept of 'misery' (14.3%) has over three times as many mentions as 'migrants'. Additionally, 'understanding' (17.9%) and 'needy' (16.7%) are also more frequently associated with political refugees compared to migrants. In essence, the pattern of respondents' responses in the lower left quadrant is nearly identical for migrants and political refugees, but it appears much stronger in terms of frequencies for political refugees.

Moreover, the diversity of concepts suggests that these respondents, on average, possess a clearer understanding of the linguistic and legal distinctions between migrants and political refugees. As a side note, it is worth mentioning that the category 'war' creates some confusion, as both migrants and political refugees are linked to this term in the MCA plot.

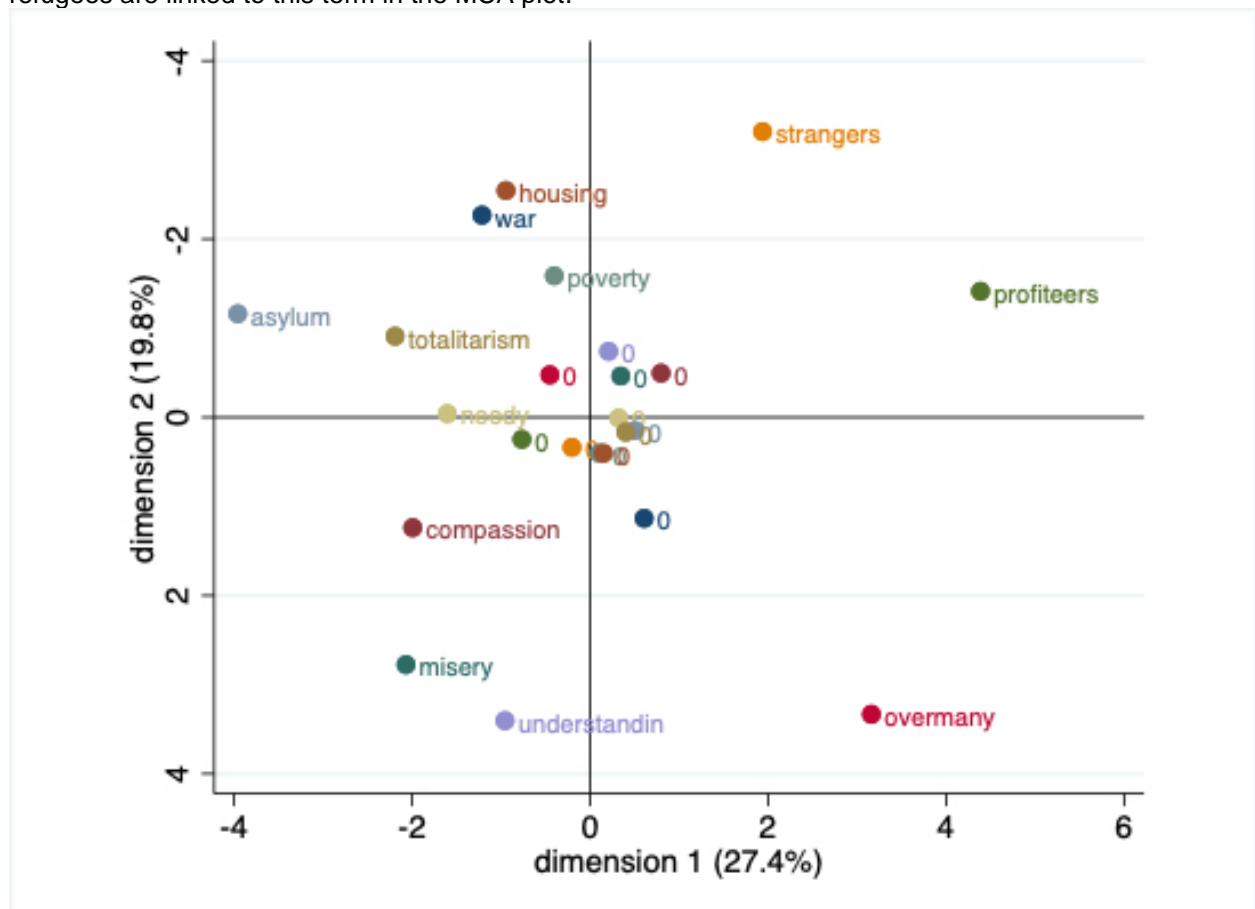


Figure 2.1. MCA plot of concepts associated with the term 'political refugees'



People with a propensity for self-transcendence values exhibit a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the concept of political refugees. Conversely, the opposite appears to be true for individuals who tend to prioritize self-enhancement values. In this case, the concepts of 'integration,' 'background,' 'housing,' and 'unemployment' have disappeared from their associations. Instead, only the categories of 'profiteers' (14.9%), 'overmany' (12.5%), and 'strangers' (9.5%) remain statistically significant for this group.

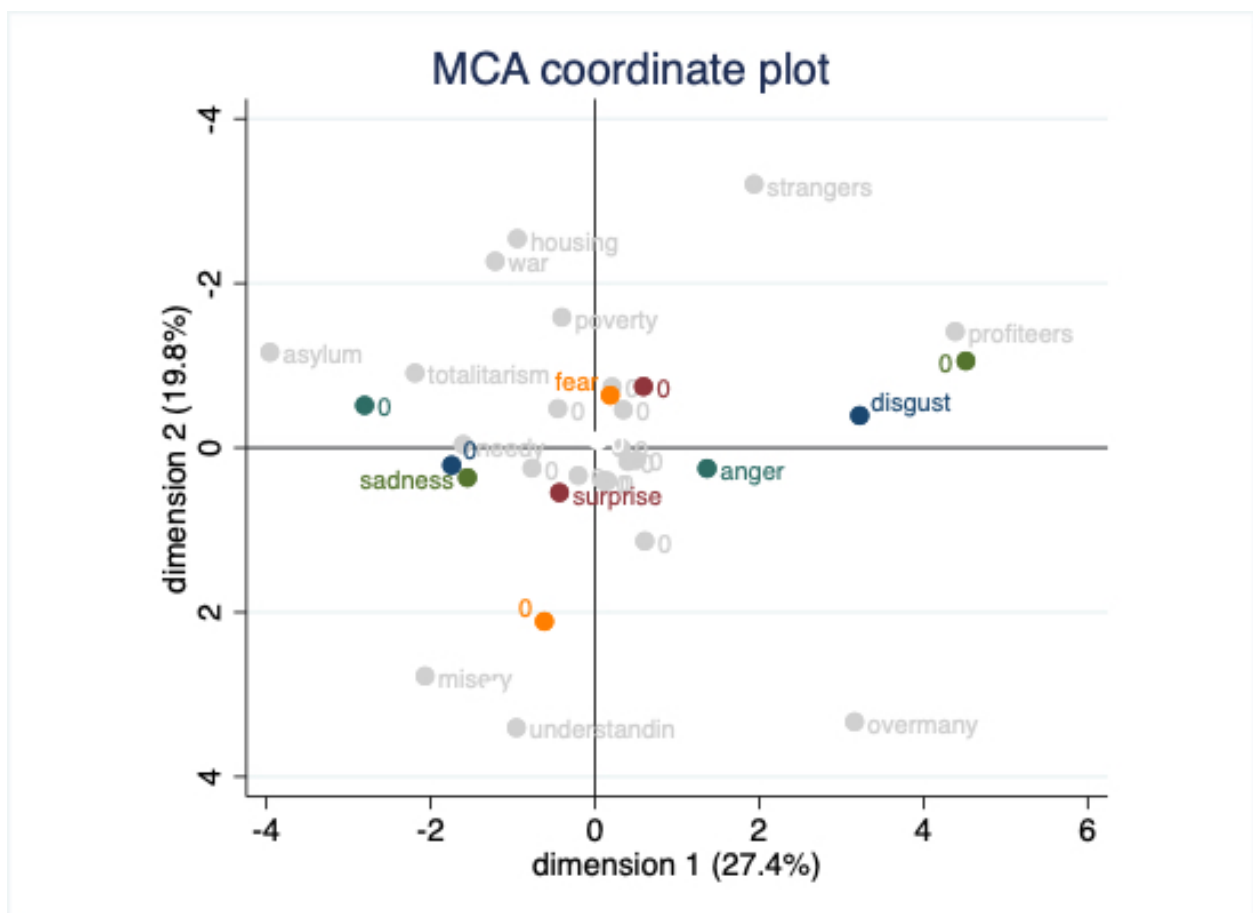
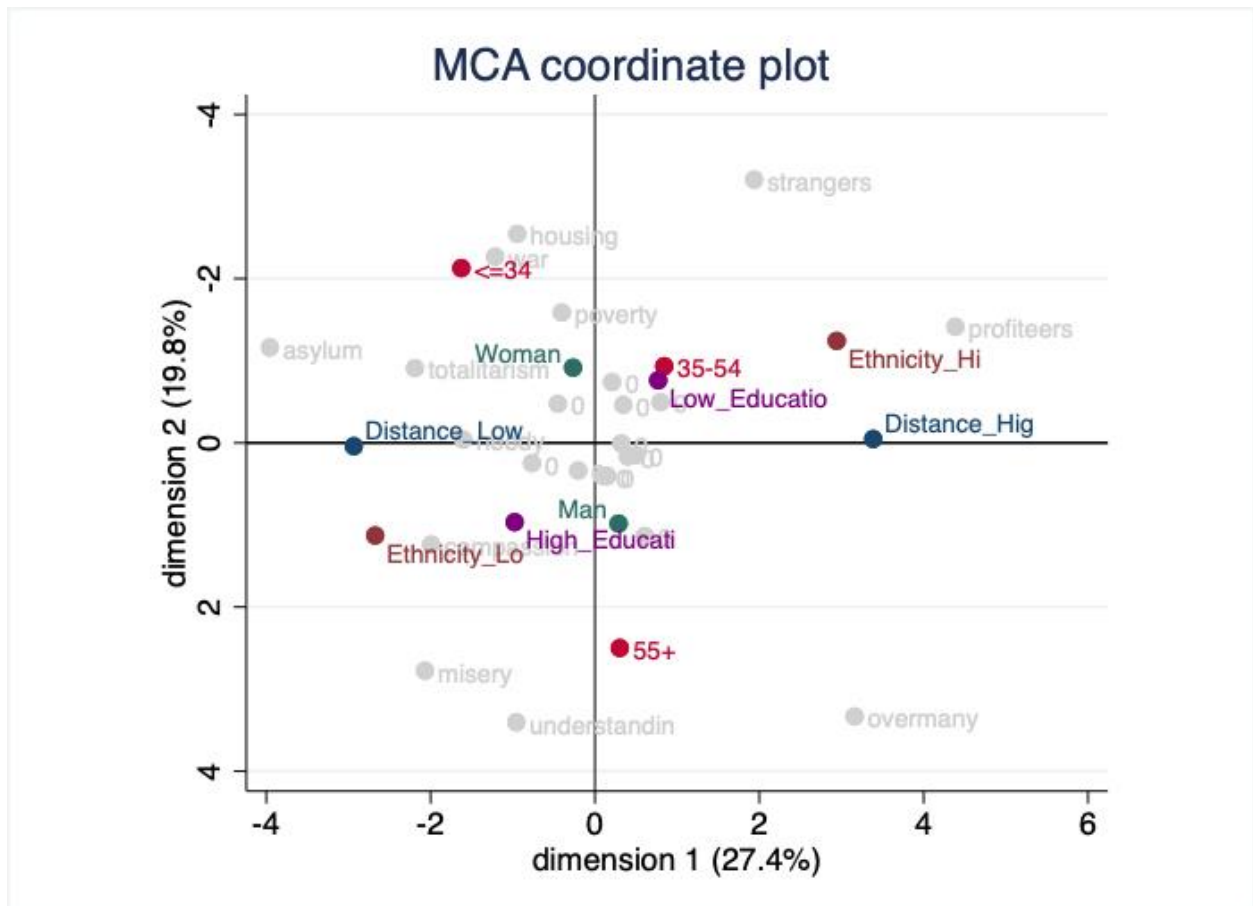


Figure 2.2. MCA plot of political refugees with emotions added as secondary variables

This observation is further substantiated by introducing emotions as secondary variables to the MCA plot of political refugees (Figure 2.2). Individuals on the self-transcending side of the plot tend to associate political refugees more frequently with feelings of sadness (reported by 74.4% of respondents), while those on the right side report higher instances of anger (reported by 67.3% of respondents) and disgust (reported by 35.1% of respondents). Fear (reported by 76.8% of those interviewed) and surprise (reported by 57.7% of those interviewed), on the other hand, do not significantly distinguish between the two sides.



**Figure 2.3. MCA plot of political refugees with socio-demographic variables and attitudes added as secondary variables**

Regarding the dimensions, the analysis thus far suggests that dimension 1 remains substantially relevant compared to the MCA plot of migrants, explaining 27.4% of the variance, slightly more than dimension 2, which explains 19.8% of the variance. However, the contrast between a predominantly cultural or economic perspective on migration falls short of fully explaining the substantial changes in the concepts associated with political refugees compared to migrants.

This interpretation is supported by the third MCA plot, which includes socio-demographic and attitudinal variables as secondary variables. In comparison to the MCA plot of migrants, the distribution of attitudes towards ethnicity and social distance appears to be more horizontal, indicating a shift in the profile of respondents. Notably, the variable of age suggests this change, as the individuals in the upper left-hand quadrant, who exhibit the most diverse views on political refugees, are on average younger.

Moreover, there is another possible explanation for the observed differences. While the economic factor still holds prominence among people with a tendency towards self-enhancement values, the combination of concepts in the upper left quadrant suggests a much less economic and more political perspective on Dimension 2. This finding aligns with existing research on political refugees, indicating that attitudes towards migrants and refugees are positively influenced by support for principles of macro-justice and



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negatively influenced by symbolic and real threats.<sup>3</sup> In other words, adapted to the context of our study, **the absence of cultural or economic threats, together with a more political perspective on social justice, may elucidate the more positive perception of the concept of political refugees in comparison to the concept of migrants.**

### ***Climate migrants***

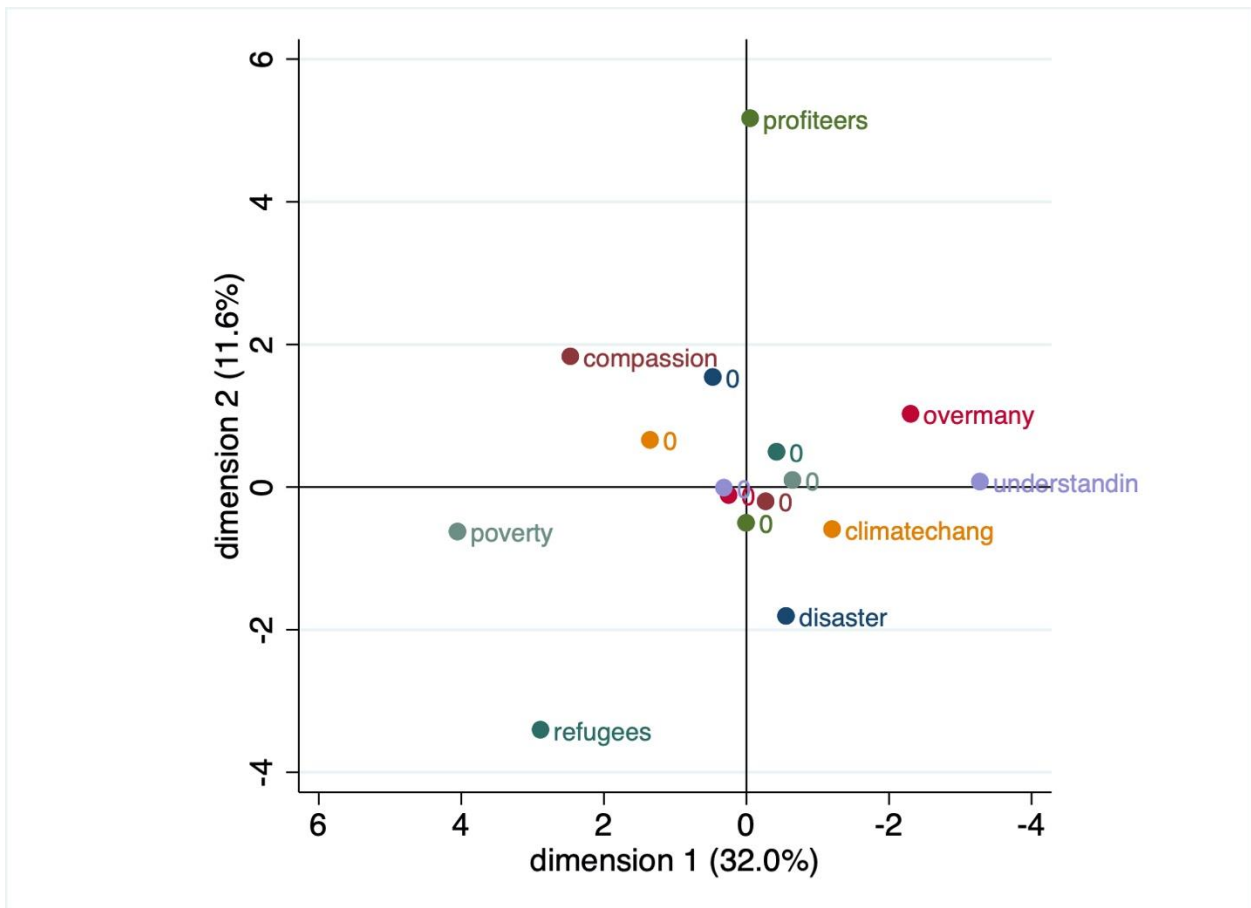
The content of the MCA plot on climate migrants is noteworthy, but equally significant is what appears to be missing from it (see Table 1). The non-response rate to the verbal elicitation test for migrants is notably higher at 20.4% of respondents, compared to the much lower rates of 3.3% for migrants and 5.4% for political refugees. Additionally, the number of concepts mentioned by respondents has significantly decreased to 8, in contrast to 15 for migrants and 12 for political refugees. This suggests that a considerable proportion of individuals either lack awareness of the concept of climate migrants or are unfamiliar with it.

This observation is further supported by the types of categories mentioned and their respective frequencies. On the right-hand side of the model, the concepts 'climate change' (mentioned by 52.2% of respondents) and 'disaster' (mentioned by 46.1% of respondents) are prominent. Additionally, 'too many' (mentioned by 9.8% of respondents) and 'understanding' (mentioned by 8.8% of respondents) are also mentioned with some frequency. The frequencies indicate that approximately two-thirds of the sample fall into the right quadrant of the model. On the left-hand side of the model, the concepts of 'poverty' (mentioned by 13.7% of respondents), 'refugees' (mentioned by 12.7% of respondents), and 'compassion' (mentioned by 8.8% of respondents) are notable mentions.

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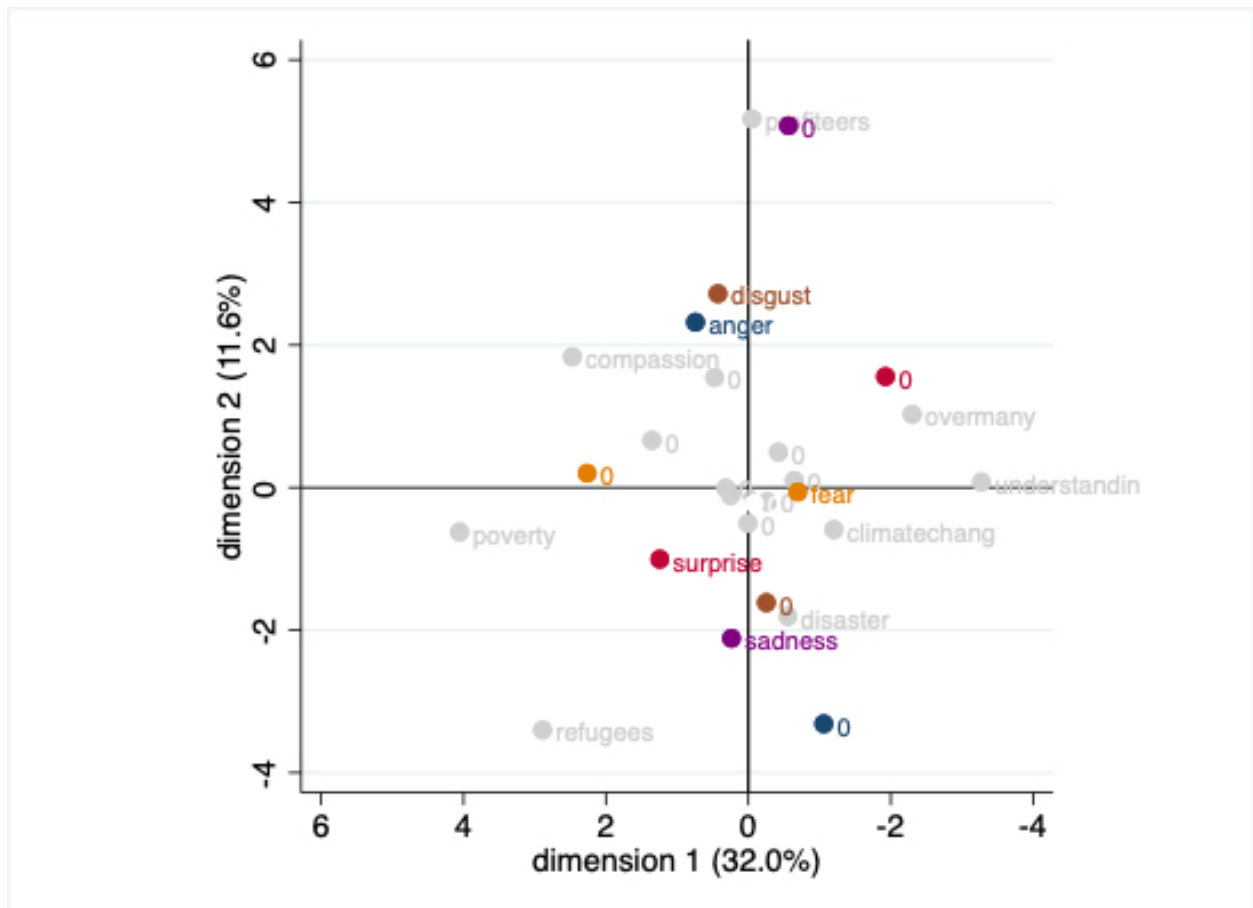
<sup>3</sup> Cowling, M. M., Anderson, J. R., & Ferguson, R. (2019). Prejudice-relevant correlates of attitudes towards refugees: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 32(3), 502-524.





**Figure 3.1. MCA plot of concepts associated with the term 'climate migrants'**

The dimensions in this plot (Figure 3.1) are less distinct compared to the previous MCA plots. Firstly, the second dimension is not statistically significant, thus only the horizontal line (x-axis) should be considered from left to right in this MCA plot. Secondly, dimension 1 explains only 32% of the variance in the model, which is lower than the percentages for migrants (45.5%) and political refugees (47.2%). Third, the conceptual pattern in this MCA is less evident than in the other analyses. The concept of 'profiteers' does not distinctly differentiate the right side from the left side of the model, as one might expect based on the previous analysis. Conversely, the concept of 'understanding', which one would anticipate to be on the left side based on the previous MCA plots, appears on the right side. Although both of these concepts were only mentioned by a small percentage of respondents (8.8%), they provide further evidence that the concept of climate migrants has not yet been widely assimilated by a significant portion of the population.



**Figure 3.2. MCA plot of climate migrants with emotions added as secondary variables**

The absence of strong polarization between perceptions is further confirmed when analyzing emotions in relation to the MCA plot (Figure 3.2) and incorporating socio-demographic and attitudinal variables (Figure 3.3). Most of these variables fall around the middle, indicating that they do not significantly contribute to distinguishing between the left and right sides of the MCA plot. However, the emotion plot reveals some noteworthy deviations from this pattern. While sadness (mentioned by 70.6% of respondents), anger (mentioned by 58.8% of respondents), and disgust (mentioned by 37.3% of respondents) do not have a significant discriminatory role, surprise (mentioned by 60.8% of respondents) and fear (mentioned by 76.5% of respondents) stand out as distinguishing characteristics.

The finding that fear plays a crucial role in left-right perceptions of climate migrants holds significant implications. Fear has been recognized as the primary emotion driving differentiation in left-right tensions concerning perceptions of migrants and political refugees. The positioning of the concepts 'compassion' on the left and 'too many' on the right can also be interpreted in this light.

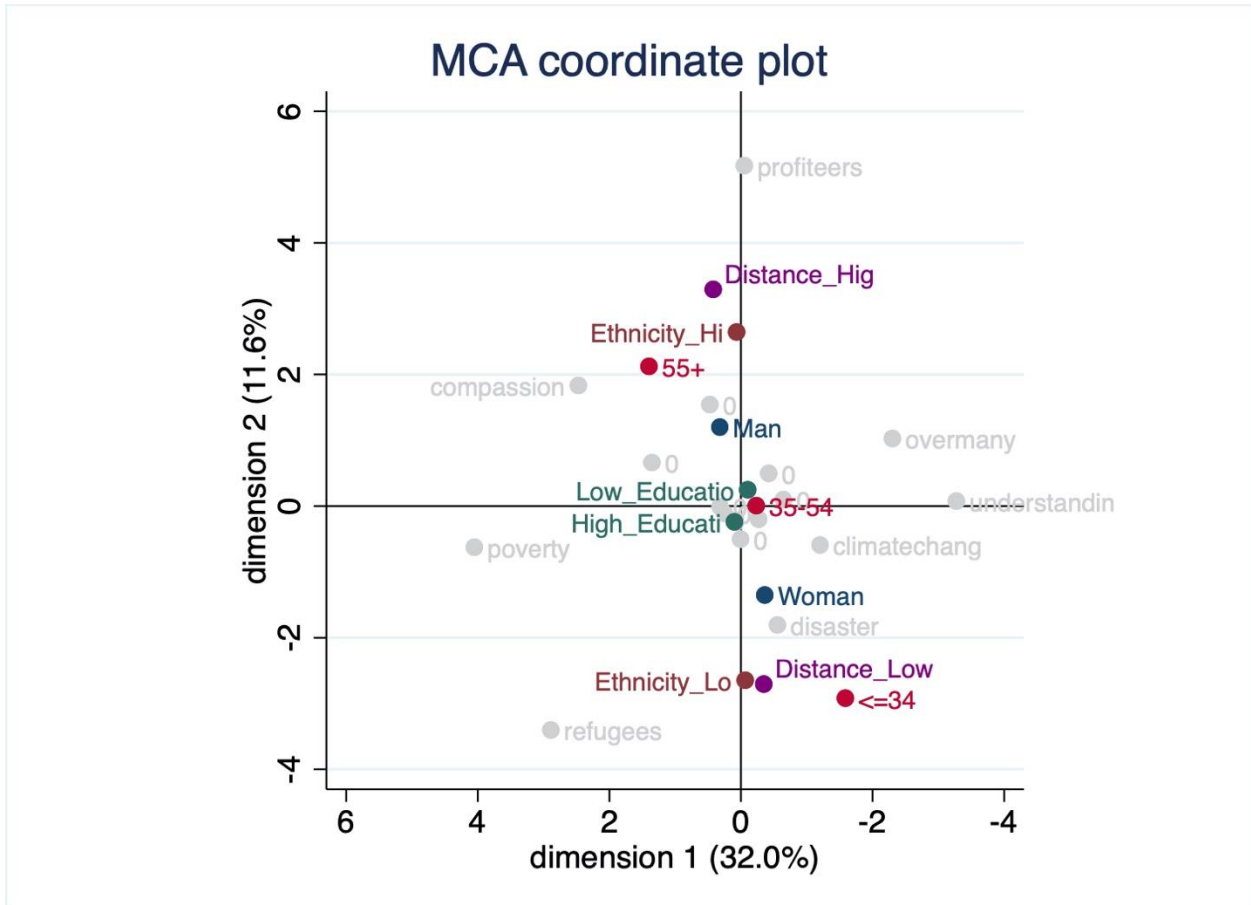


Figure 3.3. MCA plot of climate migrants with socio-demographic variables and attitudes added as secondary variables

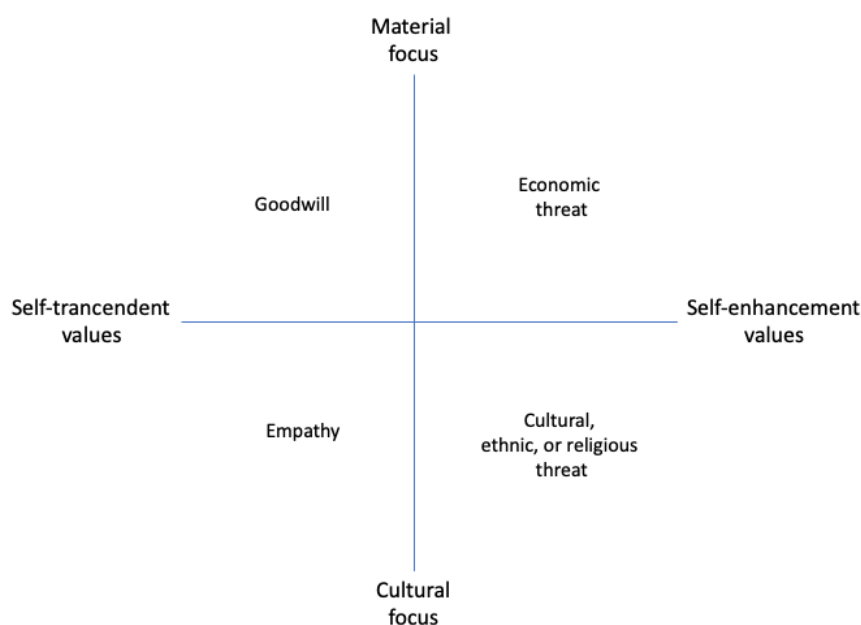


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## 4. Perceptions and Communication Dynamics: Discussion

Our findings reveal that the perception of climate migrants exhibits a dynamic interplay between **two contrasting dimensions**. On the one hand, there is a tension between **self-transcendence values**, which emphasize concern for others and the broader community, and **self-enhancement values**, which focus on personal gain and advancement. On the other hand, there is a tension between an economic perspective, viewing migrants through the lens of economic impact, and a cultural perspective, which considers their cultural influence. The combination of self-transcendence values and a cultural perspective tends to foster the most favorable and pro-migrant attitudes. In contrast, when self-enhancement values align with an economic perspective, the result is a greater tendency towards anti-migrant attitudes. These tensions and their interactions play a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes towards climate migrants.



**Figure 4: Summary of the MCA analyses**

Our research has revealed that prevailing **social trends** are likely to maintain a complex interplay in the perception of climate migrants, characterized by tensions between self-transcendence and self-enhancement values, as well as between an economic and a cultural perspective. Specifically, the combination of self-transcendence values and a cultural perspective tends to foster the most positive and pro-

migrant attitudes, while the combination of self-enhancement values with an economic perspective results in more negative and anti-migrant attitudes.

These findings align with **psychological theories** developed by Schwartz concerning self-enhancement and self-transcendence values. According to Schwartz's theory, individuals prioritizing self-enhancement values tend to experience higher levels of personal anxiety, leading to concerns primarily centered around their own interests and safety. In contrast, those emphasizing self-transcendence values are less prone to such personal anxiety, which allows them to engage in more pro-social behavior. This explains the negative association between self-enhancement values and pro-social behavior, as individuals with higher personal anxiety may struggle to extend support to others. In contrast, individuals embracing self-transcending values demonstrate a greater capacity for pro-social behavior, directing their efforts towards the benefit of others.<sup>4</sup>

While Schwartz's psychology of values provides valuable insights, our analysis also incorporates a sociological perspective. We confirm existing literature that identifies **cultural and economic threat** as key factors influencing negative attitudes towards migrants. We find that these two dimensions should not be viewed in isolation, but rather as mutually reinforcing. Perceived economic competition between groups can amplify fear of other cultures, religions, or ethnicities, further contributing to the sense of threat.

It is worth noting that Schwartz's theories do not explicitly account for how values are socially constructed, and our sociological perspective helps address this limitation. By considering the interplay between cultural and economic threat, our analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities underlying attitudes towards migrants. This underscores the importance of **considering both psychological and sociological factors** when examining public perceptions and attitudes concerning climate migrants and migration in general.

One criticism of Schwartz's psychology of values is the absence of an explanation for how values are socially constructed. In our analysis, we introduce a sociological perspective to address this limitation. This perspective corroborates existing literature that identifies **cultural and economic threat** as two key factors influencing negative attitudes towards migrants. Some researchers argue that perceived economic competition between groups may play a lesser role in shaping anti-immigrant attitudes compared to cultural differences. However, our analysis suggests that cultural and economic threat should not be viewed in isolation but rather as **mutually reinforcing**. Threat can be fueled by fear of other cultures, faiths, or ethnicities, and perceptions of economic threat can act as an amplifier.

Furthermore, we found an emerging blend of self-enhancement and self-transcendence values, along with threat perceptions, in the context of climate migrants. Consequently, it is plausible that perceptions of climate migrants will evolve in a manner similar to our findings on migrants, should current social trends persist. However, there remains a window of opportunity for a **potential reversal of the prevailing trend**. By implementing appropriate policies and employing effective political communication strategies, we can influence and shape perceptions of climate migrants in a more positive direction.

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<sup>4</sup> Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1), 11.





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Our analysis of the perception of political refugees highlights the potential impact of moral standards and political clarity in shaping attitudes. However, our most crucial finding, with implications for both policy and communication, revolves around the **role of ‘fear’ or ‘threat.’** Indeed, our analysis reveals that the perception of threat acts as a **significant driver of anti-migrant attitudes.** Understanding this dynamic is crucial for designing effective political communication strategies to preemptively influence perceptions of climate migrants and prevent the development of hostile attitudes towards them.

Threat can serve as an effective trigger to arouse individuals’ attention and prompt them to develop counterarguments. One communication strategy that utilizes threat is known as ‘inoculation.’<sup>5</sup> The process of inoculation involves presenting individuals with milder versions of anticipated persuasive challenges. These diluted challenges are designed to activate the mind’s defense system, akin to ‘mental antibodies,’ which then counteract the threatening arguments. By exposing individuals to and refuting these weakened challenges, they become better equipped to withstand more robust persuasive attempts.

However, a limitation of inoculation lies in its effectiveness mainly with individuals who hold counter-attitudinal beliefs. By inducing cognitive dissonance through fear, individuals are motivated to reconcile or strengthen the inconsistency between their existing beliefs and the perceived threat. Thus, the aim of using threat in inoculation strategies is to increase individuals’ confidence in the correctness of their attitudes towards a particular idea. In other words, for inoculation to work effectively, recipients must already possess a relatively strong cognitive and affective defense system. In our case, this implies that inoculation is more likely to succeed with recipients who combine self-transcendence with a cultural perspective, as they are less prone to experience significant anxiety about migration.

Inducing higher anxiety in recipients who are already anxious may yield unintended consequences. This is particularly relevant for recipients who hold self-enhancement values and experience strong feelings of economic or cultural threat. For this group, fear-inducing messages may not have the anticipated effect of generating resistance; instead, they might serve as justification for their existing fear. Consequently, such messages are unlikely to prompt individuals to engage in counter-argumentation; rather, they may lead to evasive strategies or resistance against presented counterarguments.

Given the limitations and challenges associated with fear-inducing messages, environmental communicators may find it more prudent to employ positive argumentation techniques. However, research on the effects of positive argumentation in environmental communication has been limited, although cognitive psychology offers a promising foundation for exploring this approach.<sup>6</sup> Our resonance analysis method, therefore, suggests that communicators should prioritize **connecting with the audience on cognitive and emotional levels** to understand which arguments resonate most strongly with their beliefs and values.

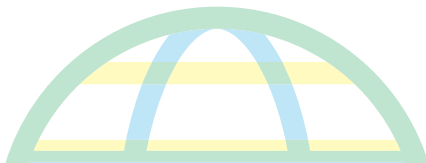
For instance, when addressing an audience that values self-enhancement, solely appealing to their compassion for migrants may not be effective. Such an approach could create cognitive dissonance, causing recipients to divert their attention or experience emotional discomfort, potentially exacerbating existing feelings of ‘disgust.’ Ignoring their fears could also prove counterproductive. In light of these

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<sup>5</sup> Compton, J., van der Linden, S., Cook, J., & Basol, M. (2021). Inoculation theory in the post-truth era: Extant findings and new frontiers for contested science, misinformation, and conspiracy theories. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 15(6), e12602.

<sup>6</sup> O’Neill, S., & Nicholson-Cole, S. (2009). “Fear Won’t Do It”: Promoting positive engagement with climate change through visual and iconic representations. *Science Communication*, 30(3), 355–379.

considerations, excessively emphasizing economic threats might not be the most effective approach. Instead, a more balanced approach that acknowledges existing cultural sentiments could generate enough arousal to capture their attention and foster some openness to arguments that highlight the importance of 'understanding' different perspectives.





opportunities  
for a fair narrative on migration

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## 5. Recommendations for policy and media messages

By carefully crafting messages and considering the diversity of audiences, journalists and policymakers can play a crucial role in shaping a constructive and inclusive dialogue on the topic of climate migrants. Based on the findings from the resonance analysis and MCA plots, several communication strategies can be considered for journalists and policymakers when addressing this important topic:

**Recognize and Address Fear:** As fear plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of climate migrants, communicators should acknowledge and address this emotion in their messaging. However, care should be taken not to exacerbate existing fears, especially among individuals with self-enhancement values and feelings of economic or cultural threat. Instead, the goal should be to alleviate fears and provide balanced information.

**Emphasize Self-Transcendence Values:** People with self-transcendence values tend to exhibit more positive attitudes towards migrants and political refugees. Communicators can appeal to these values by highlighting empathy, compassion, and understanding towards climate migrants. Presenting stories that humanize the experiences of climate migrants and their plight can be effective in fostering empathy.

**Promote Positive Argumentation:** Instead of solely focusing on negative or fear-inducing messages, communicators can employ positive argumentation techniques. This involves providing constructive solutions, highlighting opportunities for mutual benefit, and emphasizing the importance of understanding different perspectives. Positive messages that encourage cooperation and solidarity may resonate more with audiences.

**Educate and Raise Awareness:** Given that a significant number of respondents were unfamiliar with the concept of climate migrants, communicators should prioritize educational efforts. Raising awareness about climate migration, its implications, and potential challenges can help dispel misconceptions and facilitate informed discussions.

**Appeal to Shared Values and Social Justice:** Considering that people with a political perspective on social justice tend to have more positive perceptions of political refugees, communicators can frame discussions around climate migrants in the context of principles of macro-justice. Highlighting the need for humanitarian aid and global cooperation to address climate-related challenges may resonate with these audiences.

**Avoid Polarizing Messages:** Given the lack of strong polarization in perceptions of climate migrants, communicators should avoid using polarizing or divisive language. Striving for balanced and nuanced discussions can contribute to a more constructive public discourse.

**Utilize Various Communication Channels:** To reach diverse audiences, communicators should use a variety of communication channels, including traditional media, social media, and community-based



platforms. Tailoring messages to specific target audiences can enhance the effectiveness of communication efforts.

**Engage Stakeholders and Experts:** In shaping communication strategies, journalists and policymakers should collaborate with relevant stakeholders and experts in the field of climate migration. Engaging experts can ensure that information presented is accurate and evidence-based.

In conclusion, adopting communication strategies that address fear, appeal to shared values, and promote positive argumentation can contribute to a more informed and empathetic public perception of migrants in general, climate migrants, and political refugees.

