

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

Tim Hatton

University of Essex (UK) and Australian National  
University

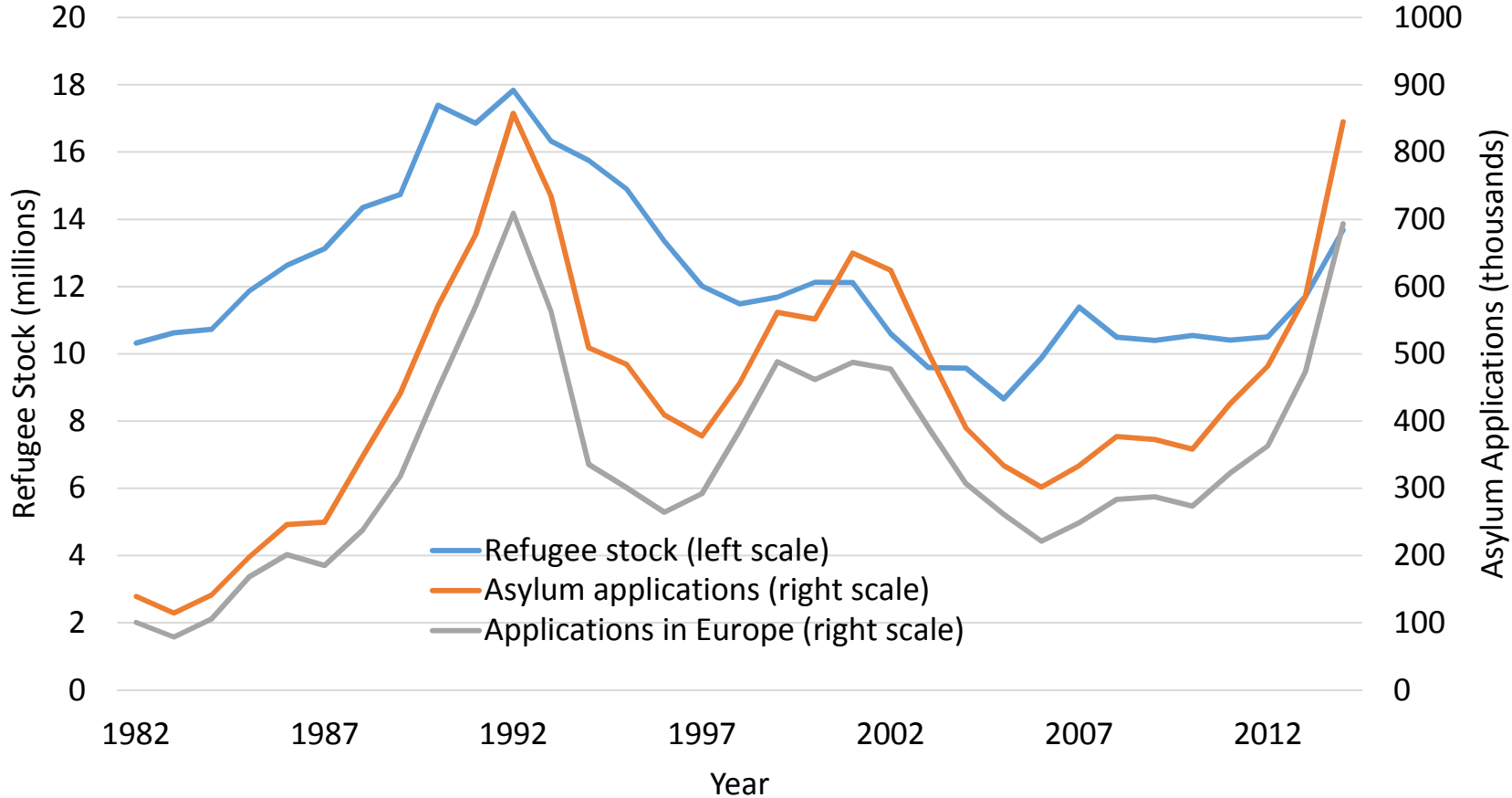
Noise from America

Firenze 11-12 June 2016

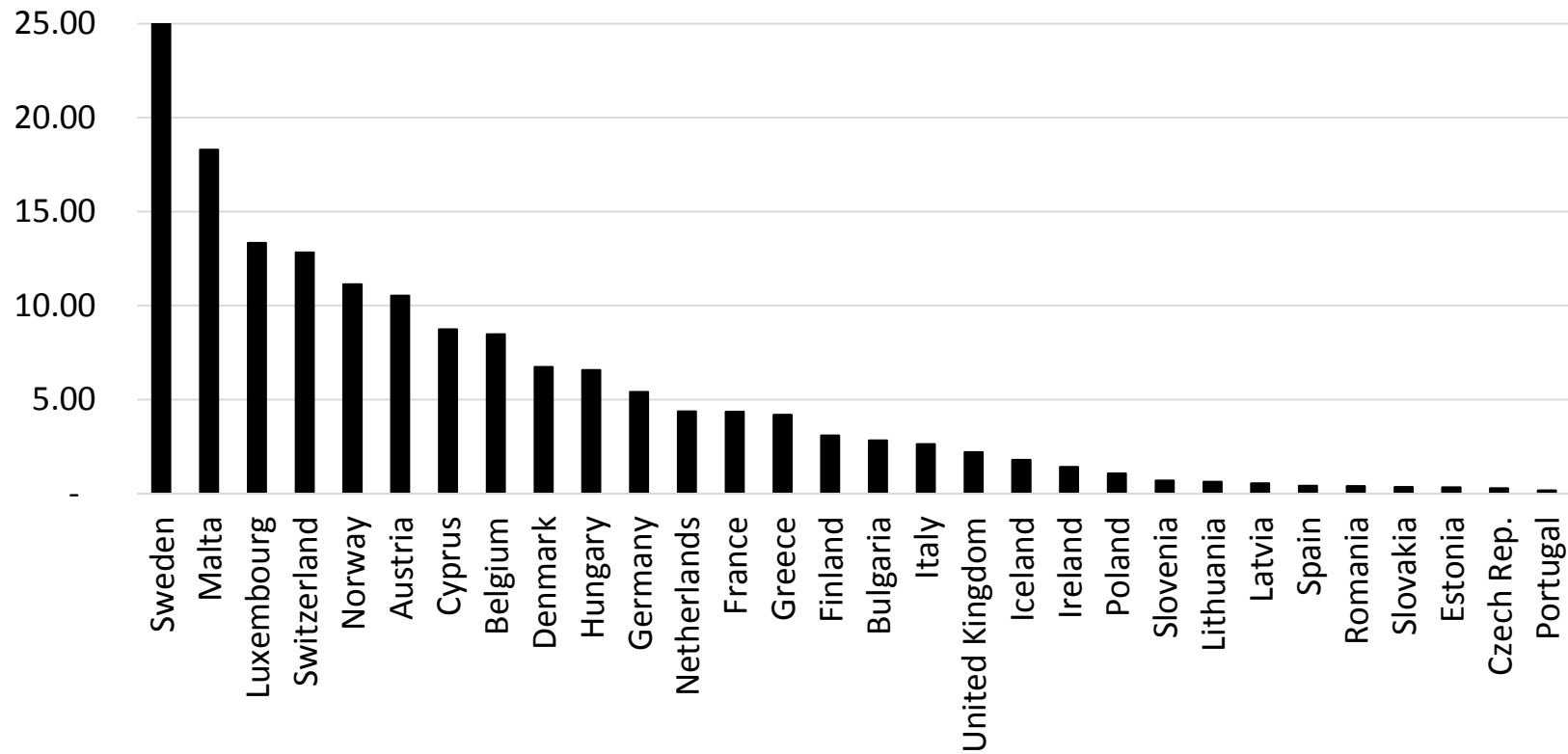
# Introduction

- The recent migration crisis has called into question the existing asylum system. Here I focus on:
- The determinants of asylum applications
- The public opinion and the political economy of asylum policy
- Three key issues: border control, resettlement and burden-sharing.
- 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.

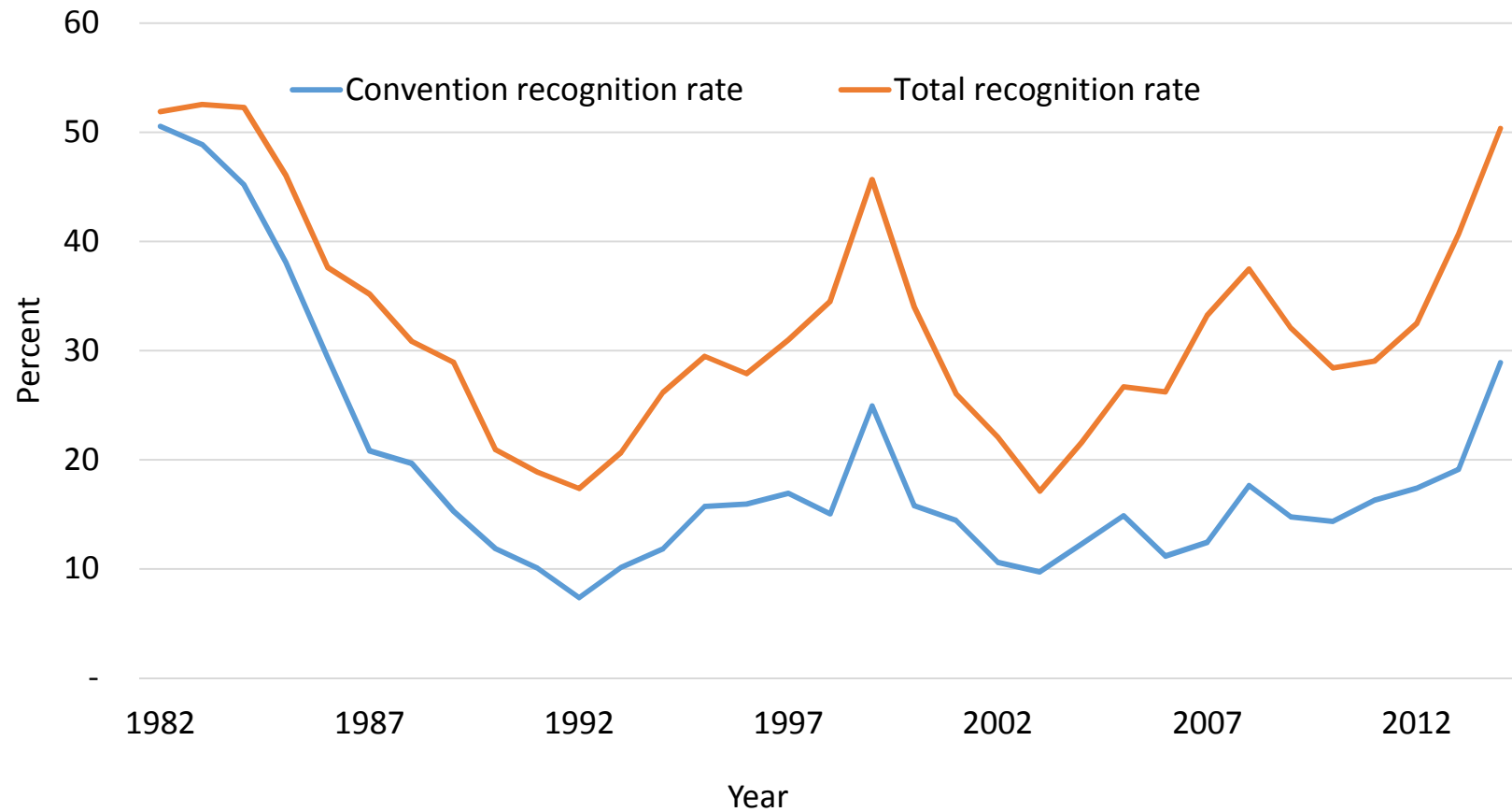
# Refugees and Asylum Seekers



# Asylum applications in 2010-4 per 1000 population



# 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:
- War, terror, human rights abuse. These are the most important, particularly the political terror scale and the F-H index of civil rights. Civil war not significant, until after 2011.
- Economic variables. 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.

# 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.
- The process of 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	-61.0	-6.8	Italy	-31.3	25.5
Austria	-46.6	0.0	Netherlands	-52.8	-11.5
Belgium	-17.5	-11.5	Norway	-35.3	-21.7
Canada	-19.2	-35.3	Poland	-17.5	-6.8
Czech Rep.	-6.8	0.0	Spain	-33.9	-20.7
Denmark	-42.8	0.0	Sweden	0.0	127.0
France	-31.9	21.2	Switzerland	-30.6	-40.7
Germany	-9.6	3.1	UK	-63.0	-22.4
Hungary	0.0	-11.5	USA	-31.9	-25.0
Ireland	-46.6	0.0	Total	-32.1	4.6



# Opinion in the European Social Survey

- In setting policy, politicians must heed the opinions of the people that elect them.
- Here I look at 14 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).

# Public opinion on immigrants and refugees

	Immigration of different ethnic group		Immigration from poor countries		Be generous in judging refugee claims	
	% few or none		% few or none		% disagree	
	2014	Change	2014	Change	2014	Change
Austria	50.3	-16.3	57.4	-8.3	37.9	-5.7
Belgium	41.1	-3.6	47.6	3.9	44.4	-15.1
Switzerland	37.1	3.5	44.5	13.9	34.9	-14.9
Czech Rep.	73.2	19.4	73.2	23.4	45.2	-17.3
Germany	25.7	-18	36.0	-6.3	34.8	-26
Denmark	38.7	-12.8	55.2	1.4	29	-21.3
Finland	53.1	-9.6	64.8	4.7	21.8	-11.3
France	38.8	-8.4	48.3	-2.9	17.5	-1.2
Ireland	50.1	14.5	58.9	22.5	20.7	-0.4
Netherlands	32.4	-9.6	46.5	2.6	46.2	-28.7
Norway	23.5	-19.8	32.0	-6.2	18.3	-28
Poland	42.7	-1.5	47.7	5.3	8.6	-4.5
Sweden	7.6	-9.3	12.6	-2.8	9.8	-13.3
Slovenia	35.8	-8	47.8	4.3	24.1	-25.4
Country average	39.3	-5.7	48.0	4.0	28.1	-15.2

# Changes in opinion 2002-2014

- On average opinion has become more positive towards ethnic minority immigrants and more negative to immigration from poor countries. But it has become much more positive towards genuine refugees (by 15 percentage points).
- Correlation across 14 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 different ethnic group opinion: 0.37
- Asylum flow and opinion on poor country immig: 0.48
- Asylum flow and opinion on generous to refugees: -0.15

# Preference versus salience

- Public opinion is not overwhelmingly negative, but there are two reasons why the mood is shifting against immigration.
- 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 mentioned).
- Salience has gone up steeply: the average for 21 European countries has 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 becomes louder and more polarised.

# Illegal immigration

- The second reason is that the recent migration crisis has seen a steep rise in unauthorised border crossings.
- Frontex data shows that unauthorised entry increased from 95,000 in 2011 to 1.82 million in 2015
- Public opinion is massively opposed to illegal immigration.
- In the *Transatlantic Trends* survey (6 countries) 75 percent are 'worried about illegal immigration'. This is more than double the number that is worried about legal immigration.
- In Eurobarometer (2015) 87 percent 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 is now as high as 70 percent on average.
- 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.
- There is surprisingly strong support for joint EU policy.

# Border control

- Tougher border controls reduce asylum applications. But there are doubts about to what degree this simply diverts migrants to other routes.
- The experience in the Western Mediterranean and in Australia suggests that it can have a big impact on maritime routes.
- But it has to be fairly draconian and is more easily achieved in cooperation with transit countries.
- The EU illustrates the failure to implement controls on some routes (e.g. to Greece) rather than that border controls are inherently ineffective.



# Resettlement

- Tougher border controls will filter out some genuine refugees so it needs to be complemented by a substantial resettlement programme.
- Poor countries of first asylum, host 86 percent of the world's refugees, many in desperate and protracted situations.
- About 80,000 are resettled each year but for 2016 the UNHCR identifies 1.15 million as genuine refugees in need of resettlement.
- Most go to US/Canada/Australia. 18 European countries participate but their total resettlement is 10,000.
- It is hard to convince countries facing large numbers claims from spontaneous asylum applicants to embark on substantial resettlement.

# Burden-sharing

- Hosting refugees satisfies humanitarian motives and can be interpreted as a public good. The benefit to individuals (and countries) is non-rival and non-excludable.
- 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. This implies tougher border controls to reduce spontaneous applications.

# 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 a massive backlash.
- It would be a constructive way of developing EU asylum policy in the longer term.