The Friedrich Ebert Foundation + Bakamo
Migration Narratives in Europe in 2018

Following the migration crisis in Europe of 2015, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) launched the Europe-wide project *Flight, Migration, Integration in Europe* in early 2017. The project aimed to capture and analyse national migration discourses across the EU28, and establish a better understanding among the public of migration policies, and a better understanding of the public's views of migration. Using surveys and focus groups would have been slow, expensive, and potentially unethical as asking questions about migration at scale could have created harmful new narratives. Instead, FES chose to analyse discourses that already existed, and commissioned the *Social Listening* specialists at Bakamo.

As the study was part of a larger research program to thematise pan-European discussion on migration, we designed a comparative overview of conversations and narratives on migration using social media and media sites in each of the EU28, using posts from the preceding 12 months. The study defined *migrants* as people living or working outside their countries of origin. We developed a keyword grid to collect the most far-reaching conversations on the topic, which included terms referring to both *migration* as a concept and *migrants* as people, which we first developed in English and then translated into the official languages of the member states.
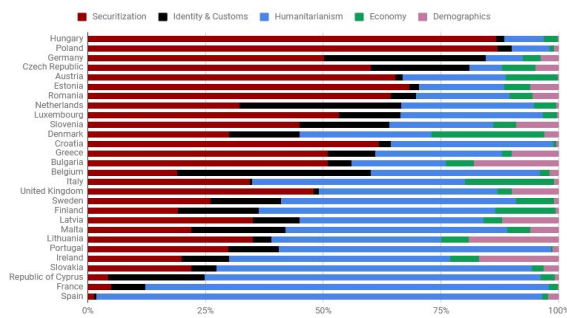
We then harvested millions of migration-related comments, all of which were part of natural conversations (at least 10,000 from each country) and filtered down to only relevant conversation among real people by discarding bots, paid posts, and adverts. We then analysed samples of between 500 and 1,000 for each of the 28 countries, with each sample selected by expert human analysts applying AI-supported technology.

To delve deeper, we selected six focus countries, picked for their degrees of geographical, social, and economic divergence, and categorised comments into five groups defined by the dominant concerns of their members: the sustainability of immigraton; an emerging demographic crisis; moral obligations in the context of migration; local social cohesion; and the perceived threats posed by migration. From each cluster, we created a segment which described how EU citizens in that cluster addressed the migration crisis. This produced five pan-European narratives, allowing us to map the influences of each narrative in each country and build a tool, also using human-trained AI, to measure interpretations (figure 1).
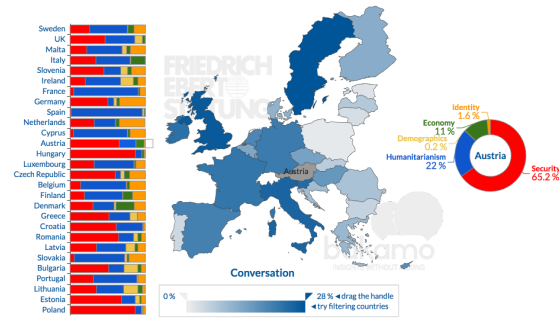
Our analysis recognised that the five narratives were unequal and differed in their degrees of dominance. Both the *identity* and *security* narratives provided the frame for an *us versus them* narrative. By examining the interplay of narratives, we observed anxieties, like fears for personal well-being, economic security, and cultural–communal safety.

By extension, we saw migration narratives acting as vessels that carried people's existing concerns. This challenged the idea that migration policies were the root of the problem, and that changing migration policies would provide solutions. On the contrary, migration was used to express the existing anxieties that people already had. We also found that ideologies that expressed abstract values, such as humanitarianism, rang hollow and implied distance rather than action. To face these challenges, we recommended new narratives that linked to local and primal anxieties and refrained from attempting to reframe the EU migration narrative.

Bakamo delivered the comparative study *Migration Narratives in Europe* at the FES conference in April 2019 in a session called *'What do Europeans think about migration online?'* We also created a report for each EU28 country and built an interactive dashboard (*see figure 2*) to make the data accessible. We also presented at the Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm with Fores' head of Migration and Integration Program, Therese Lindström, and at the Europ Conference on *Power and perils of narratives*.

(Figure 1) The Five Narratives

(Figure 2) Interactive dashboard across Europe

The study helped raise FES's profile in the debate and change minds, and we subsequently lead a study for the EU's Horizon 2020 programmes for Research and Innovation. Our study amplified FES's voice to the extent that the German Chancellor's office expressed the view that the study offered actionable recommendations. Other coverage includes:

English
- The Guardian: *Hungary government condemned over anti-immigration drive*
- Budapest Business Journal: *Social media study: Hungarians link Brexit, immigration*
- Dahrendorf Forum: *Narratives Around Migration Online: Anxiety over facts*
  Podcast:
- Social Media and Politics: *Mapping Migration Narratives in the EU with Social Media Data*

German
- Belltower.news: *Strategien gegen Netzpopulismus*
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: *Migration fungiert oft als "Hülle" für lokale, länderbezogene Probleme*

Academic citings
- ESOMAR WARC: *Kicking Refugees was Just the Beginning: The European Refugee Crisis, How the Open Society Foundation Used Qualitative Social Media Research In Defence Of Human Rights*
- Weisskircher, Manès. (2019). Der Konflikt um Migration in der Zivilgesellschaft.

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