

# The social dimension of migration in Euro-Mediterranean countries

Ayman ZOHRY

Despite the dominance of migration discourse in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the social dimension of migration is still under-researched and less focussed on compared to the political and economic dimensions. In this article, Ayman Zohry analyses the ALF/Ipsos Survey findings on the attractiveness of Europe and the SEM region as places to live. Included in his commentary are the topics of living together in multi-cultural societies, individuals' acceptance of people with a different cultural background, and the impact of cross-cultural encounters on individuals' views.

With the increasing pace and volume of mobility due to political instability in the Mediterranean basin, as well as economic disparities between Europe and its southern neighbours, migration issues are at the heart of regional political and public discourse. Media reports and news coverage concerning migration issues may lead to a picture of the Mediterranean region as one characterised by tenacious migration issues. Although different people have different thoughts about what the Mediterranean region represents, many people do indeed associate the region with migration issues. Respondents in the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey were asked to respond to seven ideas and images and whether they characterised the Mediterranean region strongly, somewhat or not at all. One of these ideas and images was 'migration issues'. The proportion of respondents who regarded the Mediterranean region as strongly characterised by migration issues was 44% in the European countries and 60% in the SEM countries. As for the country responses, this proportion ranges from 30% in France to 70% in Tunisia. Italy, 59%, and Algeria, 66%.

Despite this discourse about migration, the social dimension of migration for emigration countries/communities, on the one hand, and the arrival of immigrants and refugees in host countries on the other hand, is still under-researched and less focussed on compared to the political and economic dimensions of migration. Moreover, cross-cultural encounters, their mode and socio-cultural correlates are not explored enough to inform policy makers and allow them to incorporate such aspects in planning for more coherent migration policies in the region. The Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey provides valuable insight and the opportunity to explore the social dimension of migration. In the first part of this chapter an analysis is presented of the attractiveness of Europe and the SEM region as places to live, the remainder of the chapter moves on to the topic of living together in multi-

cultural societies and discusses the Survey's findings with respect to individuals' acceptance of people with a different cultural background and the impact of cross-cultural encounters on individuals' views.

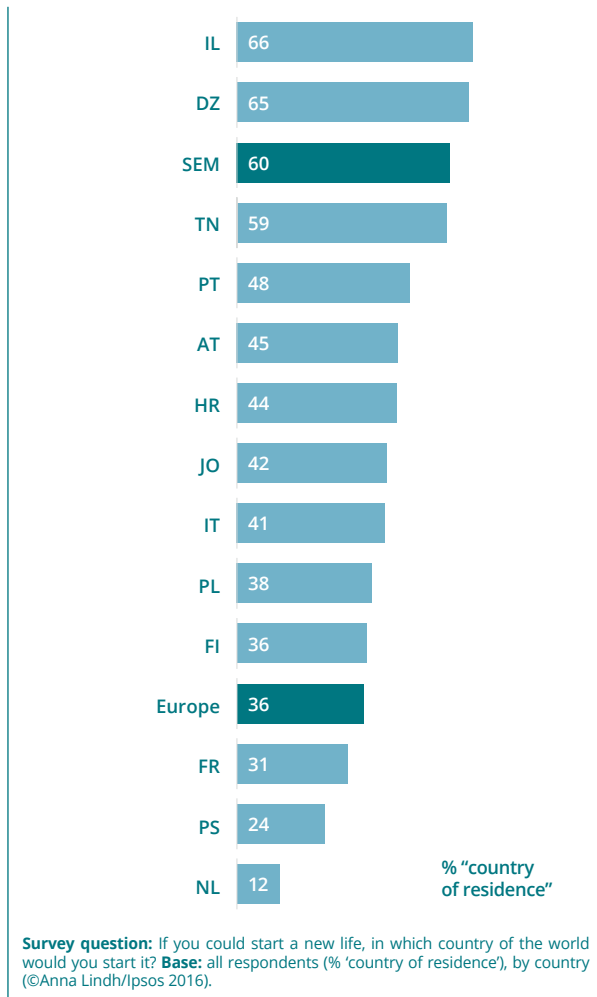
## The attractiveness of Europe and the SEM countries as places to live

In the second edition of the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey, one author observed that a persistent misconception about the Mediterranean region is that a large proportion of citizens would like to leave their country in order to live somewhere else. In 2012, 58% of respondents in the SEM countries surveyed said that their country of residence would be their preferred place to start a new life; this figure was lower in the European countries surveyed, where 40% said that they would start a new life in their own country. Also in the current Survey, respondents in the SEM countries are more likely to want to start a new life in their own country (60%) than respondents in European countries (36%). Digging down to the individual country level shows that two of the SEM countries have the highest proportion of respondents who name their current country as their preferred country to start a new life: Israel (66%) and Algeria (65%). As for the European countries, Portugal has the highest proportion of respondents who would start a new life in their own country (48%), while the Netherlands reports the lowest proportion (12%) (Chart 14.1).

The proportion of respondents who would start a new life in their own country tells us something about the attractiveness of the surveyed countries as places to live – from the perspective of the residents of the countries. The Survey also allows us to analyse the attractiveness of European and SEM countries from the perspective of those who would prefer to leave their country and live somewhere else – this analysis consists of looking at the proportions of respondents who would start their life in another country and who name either a European or SEM

**Chart 14.1**

**Country of residence as preferred place to start a new life, by country**



country as their preferred place to start a new life (Chart 14.1). However, before proceeding with this analysis, it is worth examining the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents who would leave their country if given the possibility to start a new life.

Overall, the proportion of respondents who indicate that they would start a new life in another country was 39% in the SEM countries and 61% in the European countries. As for the variations by sex, one can notice that in both regions men are more likely than women to want to start a new life in another country. The relation between age and the desire to start a new life in another country is negative for both regions; the older one is, the less likely one is to wish to start a new life in another country. In both regions, education increases the aspiration to start a new life in another country. Lastly, with respect to employment status, the highest proportion that would start a new life in another country is found among students. In European countries, no difference is observed between employed, self-employed and unemployed respondents, while in SEM countries the

proportion who would start a new life in another country was higher for unemployed respondents, followed by employed respondents, and was lower for the self-employed.

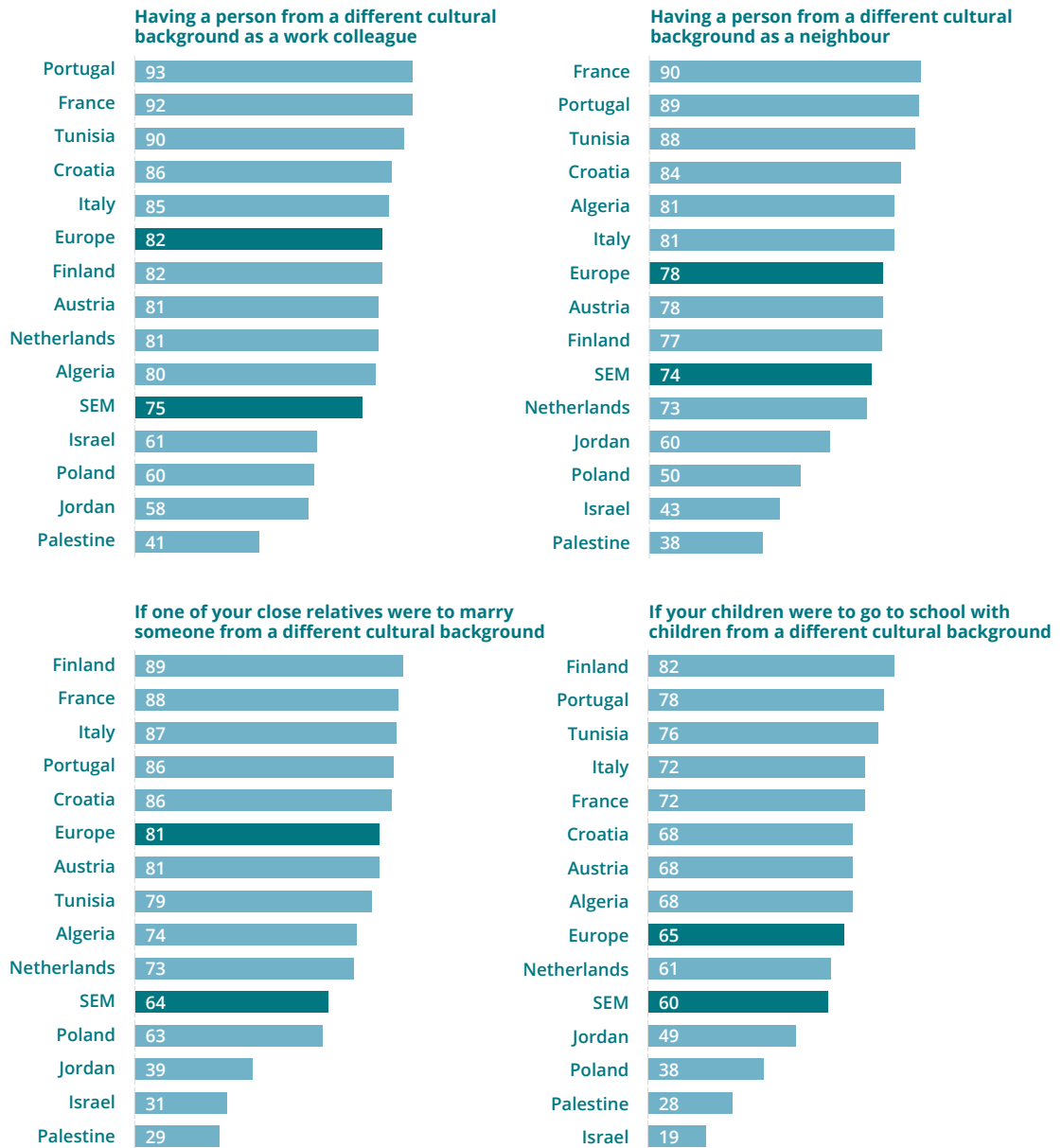
Focussing solely on respondents who would leave their country if given the possibility to start a new life, Europe comes out as the most attractive place to start a new life. In the SEM countries, 38% of respondents who would prefer to start a new life in another country say that their country of choice would be a European one; at the individual country level, this proportion ranges from 26% in Jordan to 56% in Tunisia. The popularity of Europe is highest among young people in the SEM region, while older respondents would more frequently prefer to stay in the SEM region (or move to a Gulf country). The highest proportions of SEM respondents who would prefer to stay in the SEM region (although not in their current country) are found in Jordan (26%), Algeria (23%) and Palestine (21%).

**Openness towards people from other cultural backgrounds and cross-cultural encounters**

Migration is driven and motivated by migration networks, which help the (potential) migrants in setting their expectations about life in the host country. Countries can be very different in their openness to receive people from other cultural backgrounds, as the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey illustrates. Tolerance towards people with a different cultural background was measured using four statements. For each following statement respondents were asked to state whether they would 'mind a lot,' 'mind a little,' or whether they would 'not mind too much,' or 'not mind at all': (I) Having a person from a different cultural background as a work colleague; (II) Having a person from a different cultural background as a neighbour; (III) If one of your close relatives were to marry someone from a different cultural background; (IV) If your children were to go to school with children from a different cultural background.

At first sight, the Survey findings show a high level of tolerance in both regions with the average proportion of 'not mind at all' responses ranging between 65% and 82% in Europe and between 60% and 75% in the SEM region. These average findings, however, hide a very large variation in the findings at the individual country level. For example, as for 'having a person from a different cultural background as a neighbour', the highest proportion of respondents who would 'not mind at all' was found in France (90%), followed by Portugal (89%) and Tunisia (80%), while Palestine ranks the lowest with 38% of respondents who would not mind at all having a neighbour with a different cultural background. Similarly, with respect to intercultural marriages, the highest proportion of respondents who would 'not mind at all' was found in Finland (82%), followed again by Portugal (78%) and Tunisia (76%), while Israel ranks the lowest (19% 'not mind at all' responses) (Chart 14.2).

**Chart 14.2** Not minding at all cross-cultural interaction, by country



**Survey question:** I am now going to read out a number of scenarios. For each of them, please tell me whether you would mind a lot, mind a little, or whether you would not mind too much, or not mind at all. **Base:** all respondents (% 'would not mind at all'), by country (©Anna Lindh/Ipsos 2016).

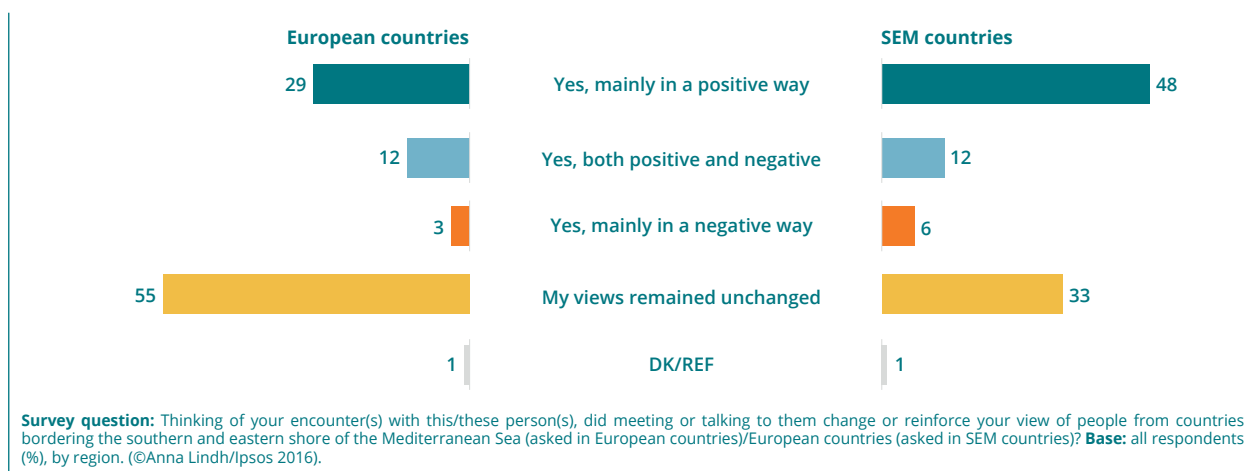
Respondents in each region were also asked if they have talked to or met someone from the other region in the 12 months prior to the Survey. The results of the Anne Lindh/Ipsos Survey indicate that respondents in European countries are more likely to have cross-cultural encounters with 53% reporting having talked to or met someone from a SEM country in the past 12 months; in SEM countries, 35% of respondents have talked to or met someone from a European country. Among the European countries, Austria has the highest proportion of respondents who have talked to or met someone from an SEM country (66%) and Portugal the lowest (18%), while

among the SEM countries, Israel reports the highest proportion (46%) and Palestine the lowest (26%).

In the European countries, men are more likely to have talked to or met someone from a SEM country (58% versus 48% for women), while the age group with the most cross-cultural encounters is 30-49 year-olds (59% compared to, for example, 47% for 65+ year-olds). Cross-cultural encounters also increase with level of education; from 38% for poorly-educated respondents to 61% for respondents with university-level qualifications. Despite the lower level of cross-cultural encounters

### Chart 14.3

#### Impact of cross-cultural encounters on perceptions about people from SEM/European countries



in SEM countries, differences in the likelihood of such encounters between socio-demographic groups follow the same pattern as in European countries.

A more important question in the context of this chapter, however, is whether meeting people from the other region has changed one's views – and if yes, was it in a positive or negative direction? Some 55% of respondents in the European countries indicate that their views remained unchanged after meeting people from SEM countries; 29% say that their views have changed positively, 12% report both positive and negative changes and only 3% answer that their views have changed in a negative way. As for respondents in the SEM countries, 48% indicate that their views have changed in a positive direction after meeting people from European countries and 12% say that some encounters with Europeans led to a positive change and others to a negative change, 33% have not changed their views, and 6% indicate that their views have changed negatively (Chart 14.3).

At the country level, Tunisia and Palestine report the highest proportion of respondents who say that meeting Europeans has changed their views about them in a positive way; countries with the lowest proportions are Poland and France (23% and 22% respectively). At the same time, France reports the highest proportion of respondents who indicate that their views remained unchanged (68%), while Poland is characterised by a higher number who report a negative change in views (15% 'both negative and positive' and 5% 'only negative'). Negative changes are also more frequently observed in Palestine, Jordan, Israel and Portugal.

#### Lessons learned from the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey

In this chapter, an attempt was made to discuss findings from the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey on Intercultural Trends that provide insight into the social dimension of

migration, which is usually under-researched compared to the political and economic dimensions of migration. The analysis can be summarised as follows:

First, migration issues have become central to public discourse in the region, and large proportions of respondents regard the Mediterranean region as being strongly characterised by migration issues. Second, it is a misconception that a large number of citizens in the Mediterranean region would like to leave their country in order to live somewhere else. In the SEM region, the popularity of Europe as a place to start a new life is highest among young people, while older respondents more frequently would stay in the SEM region (or move to a Gulf country). Third, the countries included in the Survey are very different in their openness towards people from other cultural backgrounds. The level of tolerance towards people from different cultural backgrounds was highest in countries such as Portugal and France, but was considerably lower in Poland, Jordan, Israel and Palestine. Fourth, respondents in European countries are more likely to have encounters with people from SEM countries – encounters with Europeans were less frequent in SEM countries. Cross-cultural encounters in European countries tend to have no impact on respondents' views, while such encounters in SEM countries were more likely to have a positive impact. In Palestine, Jordan, Israel, Poland and Portugal more respondents report that their encounters with people from the other region changed their views in a negative way.

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