

**Abstract Submission: Conference for the Study of Global Ethics, University of Birmingham**

**Title:** Providing Refuge in Contexts of Ambivalence and Hostility

**Keywords:** refugees, public attitudes, integration

**Author Information**

Eilidh Beaton is a PhD student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests lie in the areas of political philosophy and global justice, and her specific focus concerns migration and integration of refugees and displaced people. Her dissertation focuses on answering two related questions: first, ‘who is a refugee?’ – or more specifically, ‘what are the proper normative conditions for refugeehood?’; and second, ‘what is owed to refugees once they have been granted asylum in a new country?’ Her dissertation topic was inspired by working with Oxfam GB and the Refugee Council (UK) over the summer of 2017 on the role of UK family reunion laws on refugee integration and sense of belonging.

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Wealthy countries are falling far short of their humanitarian obligations to refugees,<sup>i</sup> even as global displacement figures continue to rise.<sup>ii</sup> Plausibly, this is (at least in part) a product of the fact that surprisingly large proportions of the population in many wealthy countries have ambivalent or hostile attitudes to refugees.<sup>iii</sup> If this is right, attitudes in these sections of the population must shift if the necessary major, progressive, and sustainable refugee policy reform is to be achieved.

Unfortunately, such attitudes are very resistant to change. Typical ‘myth busting’ strategies do not alter public opinion – in fact, disseminating favorable facts about refugees may reinforce prejudice.<sup>iv</sup> In light of these difficulties associated with successful attitude change, coupled with the sheer scale of the displacement emergency, some humanitarian policy experts have suggested framing calls for policy reform in a way that emphasizes the common ground shared by humanitarian reformers and those with ambivalent or hostile attitudes to refugees – for instance, by acknowledging the importance of integration.<sup>v</sup>

Evidence suggests that skepticism about refugees’ ability to successfully integrate contributes to hostile and ambivalent attitudes towards them.<sup>vi</sup> Research also tentatively suggests that people might be more empathetic towards refugees if they knew migrants from similar countries who had integrated well, and believed that refugees felt integration was important.<sup>vii</sup> This suggests that there may be a humanitarian argument for temporarily taking the likelihood of successful integration into account in refugee admissions policy – because doing so could bring about an immediate increase in the number of admissions, and may also gradually alleviate hostility towards refugees, opening the door to significantly more liberal admissions policies in the long-term.

However, it is unclear whether a liberal cosmopolitan theory of justice could sanction such an admissions policy, even in the short-term. Because the most vulnerable refugees are also most likely to need extensive integration support, a policy that takes ability to integrate into account may harm those individuals most in need of protection. Different accounts of non-ideal theory will have different verdicts on this outcome. Those who are unwilling to trade the immediate welfare of the most vulnerable for the potential of a more progressive future policy might attempt to identify ways to protect these people while such policies are in place. However, if such measures prove infeasible, or come with their own set of problems, the challenge of changing hostile attitudes towards refugees will remain.

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<sup>i</sup> In 2016, the UK welcomed just 18% of its fair share of refugees; and the USA welcomed just 10%. ‘Syria Crisis: is your country doing its fair share?’, *Oxfam*, 16 December 2016, Web. Accessed 14 January 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> The world’s forcibly displaced population reached record highs in both 2015 and 2016. ‘Global Trends’, *UNHCR*, July 2017, Web. Accessed 14 January 2018.

<sup>iii</sup> For instance, one 2016 poll found that over one-third of respondents from 22 countries agreed that their country’s borders should be closed entirely to refugees. See Ipsos MORI, *Global Views on Immigration and the Refugee Crisis*, (London: Ipsos MORI, 2016), p. 22.

<sup>iv</sup> Martin Baekgaard et al., ‘The Role of Evidence in Politics: Motivated Reasoning and Persuasion Among Politicians’, *British Journal of Political Science* (2017), pp. 1-24.

<sup>v</sup> Ed Cairns, ‘What Kind of Evidence Might Convince People to Change Their Minds on Refugees?’, *Oxfam Blogs*, 7 November 2017, Web. Accessed 3 January 2018.

<sup>vi</sup> Ipsos MORI, p. 22.

<sup>vii</sup> TENT, *What the World Thinks of Refugees*, (New York: TENT Foundation, 2017).