The social and political construction of migrants and asylum seekers has a significant impact in the way in which our societies face the different challenges linked to migration. This panel explores the images and representations of migration, migrants and asylum seekers in different contexts (the European Parliament, the Swedish asylum system, the Swedish migration policies) and also analyses some experiences from activists and civil society organizations that are working to promote democracy, human rights and coexistence in different Nordic countries.

69 Nordic countries’ perceptions and discursive constructions of climate refugees in the European Parliament

Dr. Kamber Güler
Konya Food and Agriculture University, Konya, Turkey

Abstract

Climate change is one of the hot topics of the 21st century with its destructive effects on all kinds of living beings in the world. The people leaving their lands due to such effects of climate change are one of the most vulnerable groups, and do not have a legal status protected under international agreements. On the other hand, the term ‘climate refugee’ is used more than ever as a political discourse today. The aim of this study is to understand and expose how the Nordic countries (i.e. Denmark, Finland and Sweden) perceive and construct climate refugees through discourses their members of the European Parliament (MEPs) deliver during the debates in the European Parliament (EP). For this aim, the study analyses the discourses of the relevant MEPs belonging to the 7th (2009–2014), 8th (2014–2019) and 9th (2019–2024) parliamentary terms, by using the official website of the EP as its data source. As its theoretical and methodological framework, the study resorts to the literature on critical discourse analysis (CDA) with some references to Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, but mostly draws on the premises and strategies of Teun A. van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach of CDA. Lastly, it concludes that the Nordic countries mostly perceive and discursively construct climate refugees in a positive way, which is inconsistent with the mainstream CDA literature in the context of migration.

Keywords

European Parliament; climate refugees; CDA.
Migration, integration and racism in Denmark: perspectives and actions from civil society

Dr. Albert Mora Castro
Human Rights Institute. University of Valencia., Valencia, Spain

Abstract

In Denmark, the rejection of migration, from almost all the political spectrum, has led to different discourses, practices and policies that have been aimed to deter migrants and asylum seekers from going into the country and have tried to reduce the prospects for those who are currently living there.

This presentation analyses how the Danish civil society is facing the main challenges in the fields of recognition, guarantee of human rights and fight against racism and discrimination, countering the mainstreamed political discourse and the negative views and attitudes towards migrants and refugees that are widespread in Denmark. 18 in depth-interviews have been carried out with key actors from civil society organizations in Copenhagen and also in other cities as Aarhus and Odense. The first findings indicate that the vast majority of these organizations consider Danish migration policies as racists and are trying to make a difference carrying out different interesting initiatives in order to counter the heavy-handed measures implemented by authorities and its negative consequences in different orders. In a hostile environment, these organizations are definitely creating hope for a better future in Denmark.

This study is part of the research project “Racism and discrimination: human rights under threat”, funded by the Spanish Government, that analyses the situation of racism and discrimination in Spain, France, Italy, Denmark and Finland and also the best political and social practices that have been implemented in these countries in order to fight racism and discrimination and promoting peaceful coexistence, interculturalism and human rights.

Keywords

Integration, racism, Denmark, civil society
Beginning in 2016, Sweden instituted a sweeping reform of its migration policies, severely limiting the rights given to migrants who had arrived seeking asylum. This policy change was clearly motivated by a desire to reduce the number of migrants arriving, yet by the time the law was passed, migrant numbers had already dropped dramatically. Even as this policy was widely criticized from many sectors in society and had negligible impact on the number of migrant arrivals, the law was renewed in 2019 and made permanent in 2021. What this has produced is a situation in which nuanced discussion of migration policy becomes impossible, as all negative impacts are justified by the focus on migrant numbers, even when the impacts on numbers in minimal. This study draws on an extensive review of governmental proposals, parliamentary debates, and written comments from government agencies and NGOs as part of Sweden’s *remiss* system from the laws in 2016, 2019, and 2021. Through this, the paper explores the social construction of migrant numbers, the politics of numbering, and the production of strategic ignorance in the context of migration policy processes.

**Keywords**

migration policy, Sweden, asylum
Can Male Asylum Seekers Win the “Vulnerability Contest”? The Racialized and Gendered Gaze of Asylum Officers in Sweden

Research Assistant Jessie Jern, Docent Anja Franck
University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, Sweden

Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of academic literature on the workings of gender and race in the asylum process. We are particularly interested in how the gendered and racialized gaze of asylum officers impacts their evaluation, and ultimately also their decisions, with regards to the protection needs of male asylum seekers. We build our analysis on official documents published by the Swedish Migration Agency coupled with qualitative research interviews conducted with asylum officers and gender experts at the Swedish Migration Agency. Our findings suggest that asylum officers tend to equate gender with women, and that the understanding of “vulnerability” seems to be reserved for those gendered female or regarded as inhabiting a non-hegemonic masculinity (i.e. LGBTQ asylum seekers). We argue that these biases are linked to racist and patriarchal understandings of “the Other” that may also have detrimental effects on male asylum seekers’ possibilities to articulate and make convincing their protection needs. As such, the paper contributes to the broader understanding of the entanglements of gender, race and deservingness in European asylum systems.

Keywords
men, asylum, vulnerability, deservingness
Democracy beyond borders: Transnational political activism of Belarusian and Russian migrants in Scandinavia and the Baltics

PhD Fellow Katrine Stevnhøj
University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract

How do Belarusian and Russian migrant activists conceive the resurgent authoritarianism of their homelands? In which ways does participation in transnational activism affect the personal lives and individual migration trajectories of the activists? How is the boundary between them and their homeland experienced, imagined, and performed in their everyday lives?

In Belarus and Russia, resurgent authoritarianism and the war in Ukraine have led to a rise in political emigration. Facing decade long prison sentences, thousands of journalists, human rights activists, oppositional figures, and other individuals at odds with the regime, have felt compelled to leave their homeland behind. Furthermore, Belarusians and Russians already residing abroad are increasingly mobilizing in oppositional political communities.

Taking empirical point of departure in ethnographic material, including 20 interviews with Belarusian and Russian migrant activists in Denmark, Norway, and Lithuania, this paper explores the links between mobility, belonging, and political activism in the context of contemporary Belarus and Russia.

Conceptualizing migrants as geopolitical actors and drawing on intimate geopolitics, the paper explores the ways in which geopolitics are contoured by and affect the personal lives of migrants. In order to understand the bordered experiences of the Belarusian and Russian migrant activists, I suggest perceiving activism in exile through the “lens of the intimate”, considering the affective dimensions of migrant activism.

Keywords

Transnationalism; Activism; Affect; Russia, Belarus