



Attitudes Toward Refugees, Trafficking in Human Beings and Racial Discrimination in a Locally Representative Sample in the northern part of Cyprus

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 **better
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FOREWORD

Refugee Rights Association (RRA) was established in 2009 with the aim of working against violations to the right to asylum in the northern part of Cyprus by offering legal solutions and providing social support for refugees. These efforts have since been extended to combat trafficking in human beings (THB) and racism. Although significant steps have been made toward raising awareness on refugee rights and human trafficking in the northern part of Cyprus, negative attitudes, and discrimination toward these groups as well as to international students and migrant workers is rife.

The aim of this publication is therefore to provide an overview of attitudes toward refugees, THB and racism directed at international students and migrant workers residing in the northern part of Cyprus using a locally representative sample to further our understanding of the content of these attitudes.

By furthering our knowledge on attitudes toward these groups, RRA and other organizations will be able to better tackle discrimination, design and implement training programs and develop advocacy campaigns dedicated to enhancing the rights of all vulnerable groups residing in the northern part of Cyprus.

On behalf of RRA,
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1 Introduction

1.1 'Better Together' Project - Aims and Goals

The project 'Better Together' aims to better safeguard the human rights of vulnerable migrant groups. One way to achieve this is to improve negative attitudes and tackle myths and false beliefs regarding these groups.

1.2 Attitudes toward Refugees, THB and Racism in the northern part of Cyprus

Attitudes toward Refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at the end of 2021 89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. Out of these 27.1 million are refugees and approximately half of them under the age of 18, and hence children.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol are two key documents critical for legislation. These legal documents provide a definition of the term 'refugee' and outline refugee rights. They also state the legal obligations of the 149 state parties who signed the protocol in protecting these rights and assisting in finding long-term solutions for refugees (UNHCR, 2010).

Despite this, finding durable solutions for refugees has become a universal challenge as returning home, although may be the preferred option by many refugees, is often not possible due to continued war, conflict or insecurity. In the UNHCR's 2019 trends report, in over a decade between 2009-2019, at least 100 million people had been forcibly displaced however only a fraction had found a solution- with 3.9 million refugees returning back to their home country. Refugees might also attempt to resettle in a third country for permanent residing using another country as temporary asylum however, often this may not materialise leaving millions of refugees in a constant state of exile- for instance in 2015 only 107.100 refugees were admitted for resettlement in host countries. Another important issue is that the majority of countries (83% according to UNHCR, 2021 trends report) who receive refugees are developing countries of low- or- middle income which has an impact on the refugees seeking asylum.

Often these countries cannot provide for the needs of their own citizens. In such circumstances refugees may take control of the situation by attempting to travel to other countries, often without authorization, mostly in dangerous conditions, e.g., by boat or trucks. According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project, at least 5,684 deaths have been recorded since the beginning of 2021 on the migration routes to and within Europe (MMP, 2021).

Although their countries have formally committed to protecting refugees, many European citizens report migration as one of its greatest concerns (European social survey, 2016) which has consequences for how migrants are received and treated by the host country. There are often diverse responses to refugees, and while some are willing to welcome them others are reluctant and can harbour negative attitudes and behave in a discriminatory manner. A number of public opinion polls have consistently found that respondents are more likely to want to close borders to all refugees and see refugees as likely terrorists, or, a burden to the country as they take jobs and social welfare (Wike, Stokes, & Simmons 2016). In a 2016 IPSOS survey across 22 nations across the globe, attitudes toward immigration was generally negative and the majority of participants were concerned about the impact of immigration on public services of the country.

Racism toward international students and migrant workers. As of the 2020-2021 academic term there were a total of 108, 295 students registered at universities in the northern part of Cyprus, of which 12,907 were from third world countries and 43,101 from Turkey (Amcaoglu, 2021). Host receptivity towards international students is an important aspect for international students' satisfaction. However, studies abroad have often shown unfriendly or indifferent host community attitudes in which contact with the host community is hard to achieve (Brown, 2009; Marginson et al. 2010). International students have often reported loneliness and racism to be two factors associated with their dissatisfaction (Marginson et al. 2010). This is no different in the northern part of Cyprus, recently VOIS (the voice of international students), an active students association for international students, published a report in which 88% of their 524 respondents stated that they had been victims of racism in the northern part of Cyprus (VOIS, 2020). Despite this, there is a large economic dependence of universities and states on the fees from international students and it is a human rights obligation to provide an optimum service to students, so that students can make the most out of their short stay in the host society. Returning as a tourist would further enhance economic growth, hence it is always in the best interest of host communities to make international students' experiences the most pleasant (Brown, 2009).

The literature on immigration stated also above, reveals an unapproachable and often racist host community. This has often been fueled by politicians who portray immigration as a problem and migrants as a threat as well as negative media rhetoric (Fox, 2013). A number of factors may be predictive of anti-immigration attitudes and racism directed at migrants. These include a perceived threat to values and norms; competition for resources, such as housing or employment as well as negative stereotypes and dehumanization of the migrant group (for an overview see Esses et al., 2001). Such negative views have also intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to a surge of negative attitudes toward immigrants and immigration and is not about to reduce any time soon (Yamagata et al., 2020). As the crisis continues, migration-related negative sentiments driven by perceptions of threat, competition, lack of control, and heightened authoritarianism are expected to endure (Esses & Hamilton, 2021).

Attitudes toward Trafficking in Human Beings (THB). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines human trafficking as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.' According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) it is estimated that globally, 24.9 million women, children, and men are forced into human trafficking. This can include trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced labor or other forms of exploitation such as organ removal or criminal activity. Global profits from human trafficking are estimated at US\$32 billion (ILO, 2008). Profiles of the victims can change based on region in the world (e.g., more children as targets in Sub-Saharan Africa, but adults in Eastern Europe) however female victims continue to be most targeted (UNODC, 2020).

Survivors of trafficking suffer significant physical and mental health issues as a result of the coercion and violence they experienced. These may include injuries resulting from physical or sexual abuse, sexually transmitted infections, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and suicidality (Ahn et al., 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2006). This data however is scarce and drawn from a small percentage of trafficking survivors- those who were able to escape the trafficking situation and were able to seek medical attention. It is assumed that the mental and physical status of those undocumented trafficking victims are much worse (Zimmerman et al., 2006).

Despite advancements in policy and attempts to better understand THB as a social phenomenon impacting humans globally, general knowledge and understanding regarding its realities continue to be low (Nsonwu et al., 2017). In fact, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (Polaris Project, 2006) has stated that myths regarding THB have contributed to the difficulty in identifying trafficking victims and that such myths are impeding victim identification. For instance, media portrayals of trafficking victims are limited to 'young innocent girls' excluding teen and young adult women, limiting the degree to which other victims are seen as worthy of rehabilitative care (Menaker & Franklin, 2013). It is for this reason that further research is needed into understanding people's attitudes and knowledge pertaining to THB to better tackle myths and false beliefs.









1.3 Current Research

Based on the above literature, the aim of the current research is to understand the attitudes toward refugees, levels of prejudice and racism to international students and migrant workers, as well as attitudes toward trafficking in human beings in the northern part of Cyprus. Understanding such negative attitudes will provide a roadmap for tackling them and creating effective interventions.

2 Sample

A total of N=1001 participants completed the survey forming a representative sample based on the distribution of population in the northern part of Cyprus. The data was collected by a consultancy and research centre over a period of 3 weeks during October-November 2022. The demographic characteristics of participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample

		PROPERTIES	N (%)
	AGE, YEARS	18-76 years	Mean= 35.7 Standard Deviation=12.56
	GENDER	Female Male Other Do not want to reply	405 (40.5%) 584 (58.3%) 2 (.2%) 10 (1%)
	NATIONALITY	Turkish Cypriot Turkish Dual Turkish Cypriot & Turkish Other	439 (43.9%) 209 (20.9%) 343 (34.3%) 10 (1%)
	RELIGIOSITY	Yes No No reply	721 (72%) 174 (17.4%) 106 (10.6%)
	RELIGION	Islam Christianity	605 (60.5%) 10 (1%)
	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	Primary School Secondary School High School University Postgraduate	74 (7.4%) 97 (9.7%) 416 (41.6%) 378 (37.8%) 36 (3.6%)
	RELATIONSHIP STATUS	Married Single Cohabiting	495 (49.5%) 444 (44.4%) 62 (6.2%)
	REGION	Nicosia Famagusta Kyrenia Morphou/Guzelyurt Trikomo/Iskele Lefka/Lefke	322 (32.2%) 251 (25.1%) 216 (21.6%) 75 (7.5%) 102 (10.2%) 35 (3.5%)

3 Research Findings

In order to assess the full scope of attitudes and emotions toward refugees we asked a number of different questions, using scales with sound psychometric properties. These include attitudes toward refugee rights, acceptance of refugees, perceived consequences of migration and general attitudes/feelings.

3.1 Refugees

3.1.1 Attitudes Toward Refugee Rights

Participants were asked to state the extent to which they agreed with statements pertaining to refugee rights. All attitudes were measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Two of these items were obtained from Unser, Döhnert and Ziebertz (2018) based on international conceptualizations of refugee rights ('The government' should provide a decent standard of living for political refugees'; 'The government' should guarantee political refugees freedom to travel'). Participants on average did not fully agree or disagree to these items since they scored an average of Mean= 2.99 and 2.89, respectively (out of 5). The remaining items were created by the RRA research team specific to the context of the northern part of Cyprus. For the statement 'More precautions should be taken in the northern part of Cyprus against the discrimination of refugees' while 46.3% agreed or strongly agreed, 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed. An important indicator of 'citizenship' rights, 58.4% reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing to the statement 'Refugees in the northern part of Cyprus should be given the right for 'citizenship' while only 20% agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, 50% reported agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement 'We should close all borders- we cannot accept more refugees' while only 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Participants were more positive with regards to refugee children, whereby 57% reported agreeing or strongly agreeing to refugee children being integrated into the education system (while 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

Finally, participants were also asked whether they believed refugees had access to human rights in the northern part of Cyprus, most people stated it being average (approx. 46% gave a mid-response of '3' on the scale ranging from 1 'very poor' to 5 'very good'), further 32.7% believed it was 'poor' or 'very poor' and 22.5% stated it was 'good' or 'very good'.

A single item called the 'feeling thermometer' (Esses, Haddock & Zanna, 1993) was used to ask participants to express their overall feelings and attitudes towards refugees with the analogy of a thermometer in which 10° indicates the coldest (most negative) attitudes to 100° which refers to the most hot (positive) attitudes and feelings. On average participants rated this as 46° which is a moderate level (neither positive nor negative). However, the majority of answers were on the 'colder' and hence more negative side of the scale (see Figure XX).

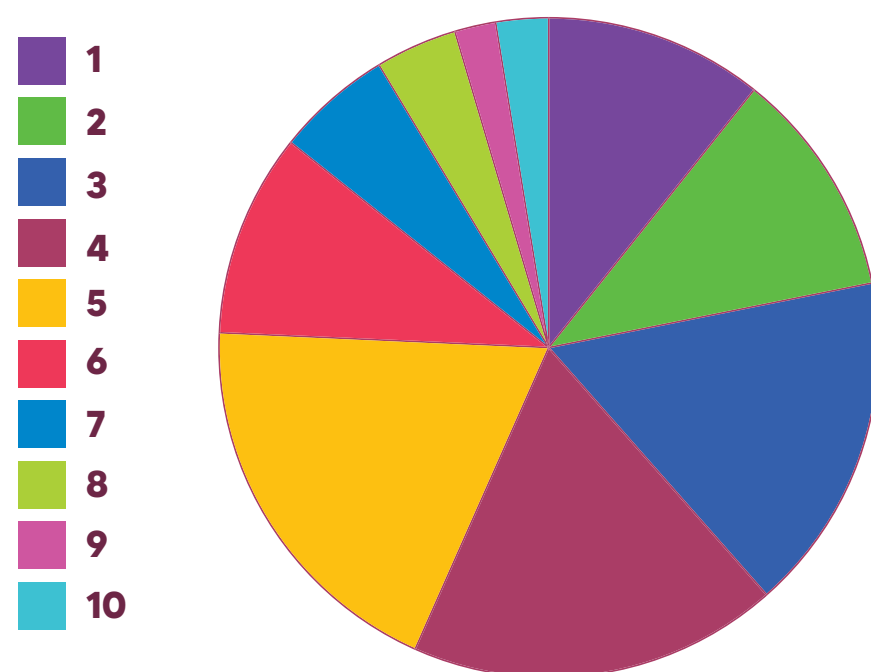


Figure XX. Thermometer of feelings and attitudes toward refugees 10° cold to 100° hot.

3.1.2 Acceptance of Refugees

To assess acceptance of refugees we used a scale by Albada, Hansen, & Otten (2021). Once again, participants acceptance levels were on the average of the scale (generally ranging between 2.99-3.23; out of 5 as 'strongly agree') for items such as 'People must be able to flee to countries, including the northern part of Cyprus, to escape from war or persecution' and 'We have to accept refugees in the northern part of Cyprus because it is part of our culture and history to welcome people who flee war and violence.' One item which was particularly lower than the others was 'The northern part of Cyprus has the economic and financial resources to welcome refugees, and therefore has an obligation to do so' while 20.5% agreed with this, over twice the amount disagreed or strongly disagreed at 54.1%.

3.1.3 Perceived Consequences of Migration

To measure perceptions of consequences of migration we asked participants several questions that implied a negative or positive consequences of migration. It was found that participants were less likely to report that migration had positive consequences for the northern part of Cyprus compared to positive. For instance, 50% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item 'Immigration is good for the northern part of Cyprus cultural life and makes the northern part of Cyprus a livelier and more exciting place to live.' Similarly, to the item 'Immigration is good for the northern part of Cyprus's economy and provides new skills, new opportunities and stimulates success' 43.7% stated disagreeing or strongly disagreeing compared to only 27.7% who agreed to this view.

Participants were more likely to agree with 'Immigration is bad for the northern part of Cyprus and divides society into opinions and beliefs that are strongly opposed to each other,' 42.4% of participants were more likely to agree with this compared to 24.2% who reported disagreement. Further, they reported more agreement with the statement 'Immigrants in the northern part of Cyprus have made it more difficult for 'citizens' of the northern part of Cyprus to find employment' (54.4% agree vs. 19.6% disagree).

3.1.4 Contact with Refugees

An important predictor of positive feelings and attitudes toward refugees is the amount of contact and friends one has from these groups (De Coninck, Rodríguez-de-Dios & d'Haenens, 2021). For this reason, we assessed whether our participants had any positive contact with refugees in general. Only 12.6% of participants reported having 1 refugee friend, all other participants reported no refugee friends. While only 15.4% reported having positive contact with refugees, 57.8% reported having no positive contact with refugees at all. This is indicative of the low levels of interaction between those residing in the northern part of Cyprus and refugees.

3.2 International Students and Migrant Workers

3.2.1 Racism Toward International Students and Migrant Workers

We assessed racism to international students and migrant workers using a scale developed by Anderson (2018). We used the colloquial term of 'foreign' when referring to international students and migrant workers as this is the generally used terminology within the community. Classical prejudice is measured with items such as 'foreign students and workers... need to go back to where they came from; are a waste of time, money and space; are more trouble than they're worth'. A second scale measured conditional prejudice which aims to capture more subtle forms of prejudice coined as 'conditional prejudice' assesses more implicitly negative attitudes such as 'foreign students and workers... should only come here if they don't have a criminal history; are okay as long as we don't take in too many of them.' Lastly, we assessed whether participants showed low prejudice by asking whether they believed international students and migrant workers added economic and cultural richness to the northern part of Cyprus. Results showed higher conditional prejudice (Mean= 3.45) than open prejudice (M=3.22) and participants scored around the mid-point of the scale showing moderate levels of prejudice.

Further analysis of each item can once again be seen in the appendix, but it is worthy to assess a few statements to further understand perceptions of international students and migrant workers in the northern part of Cyprus. For instance, 41% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'they are not welcome in the northern part of Cyprus' (as opposed to 24% who generally disagreed). A similar negative sentiment was expressed in 'they always get involved in crime' whereby 37% agreed or strongly agreed in comparison to 27% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Relatedly, a large percentage of 52% agreed to the sentiment 'they bring drugs into the northern part of Cyprus' while only 16% disagreed. More participants also agreed with the statement 'they always cause trouble' (42% agree vs. 26% disagree). Finally, whereas 47% believed international students and workers could not integrate into the northern part of Cyprus, only 22% disagreed with this.

In terms of positive sentiments, on average about 42% of participants were more likely to disagree (or strongly disagree) with statements supporting international students and migrant workers as a source of richness and diversity (as opposed to approx. 27% who agreed).

We assessed general feelings and attitudes using the same thermometer scale explained above. It was found that participants reported negative feelings and attitudes in general- they scored an average of 22° out of 100°. These findings are indicative of racist attitudes and sentiments regarding international students and migrant workers in the northern part of Cyprus, with a general view that these groups cannot integrate, are more likely to be a source of crime and therefore not welcome.

3.3 Trafficking in Human Beings (THB)

3.3.1 Attitudes Toward THB

A scale was utilized to assess attitudes toward THB developed by Nsonwu et al. (2015). It has a number of subscales in which different dimensions of attitudes can be further investigated. One such subscale is with regards to whether THB is a worldwide issue and in general participants agreed with the notion that THB was a social problem that needs to be resolved (almost 74% agreed or strongly agreed). Another subscale assessed perceptions of skills and knowledge regarding THB. Participants for instance rate the extent to which they believe they can tell a victim of THB, have enough knowledge on the topic, or, know the risk factors for THB. We found that participants generally rated themselves at the midpoint on the scale (1=low; 5=high knowledge) at Mean= 3.27 (SD= .80). For instance, 40% of people stated they could tell if somebody was a victim of THB (as opposed to 27% who did not believe they could). Similarly, 35% of participants stated they knew enough on THB and could assist someone they believed to be a victim (as opposed to approx. 30% that they did not have this knowledge).

Participants were also asked the extent to which they believed victims of THB could escape or leave the situation if they truly wanted to- 42% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement as opposed to 28% who did not. Despite this, approximately an equal amount of agreement and disagreement was stated to the item: 'I think if a woman is forced into prostitution, she can escape from this if she really wants to', suggesting an ambivalence in attitudes. Almost half of participants strongly opposed to the statement 'If a child solicits sex from an adult in exchange for money, food, or shelter, they are not a victim' (49.5% strongly disagree; 12% disagree; 19% agree & strongly agree).

A number of statements assessed participants beliefs about the content of THB- the majority of participants agreed with the idea that THB was synonymous with smuggling (63%) and prostitution (59%) and that it was mainly based on two categories- sex and labor (56%). Over 68% believed that women and children were the most likely target of THB and that human trafficking is 'always controlled by organized crime' (over 50%).

Additionally, clubs were seen as the most likely venues for THB. Close to 48% disagreed that THB was not an issue in the northern part of Cyprus and nearly 53% said that THB was a growing issue in the northern part of Cyprus. Over 45% stated believing that 'citizens' of the northern part of Cyprus were not likely victims of THB. Further, 51% stated that if persons were trafficked in or out of the northern part of Cyprus, they were always likely to be from poor, uneducated communities.

Similarly, they were more likely to agree with the idea that victims of THB are foreigners and irregular immigrants (nearly 44%). Specific to the context, participants were asked their opinions about the common practice whereby foreign workers passports within the workplace are confiscated, over 43% disagreed and thought it was unacceptable. As for the living arrangements of workers, 42% agreed with the statement 'I am not surprised when I see that the construction workers live in the construction sites.'

This draws the picture that although THB is considered a growing issue in the northern part of Cyprus it is viewed as something only experienced by foreigners of lower socioeconomic background and not in its own 'citizens'. Despite this over 47% believed that extra funding should be provided for assisting victims of THB and over 42% stated agreeing with the need for legal texts preventing discrimination against victims of THB. The majority of participants also thought access to human rights was about average in the northern part of Cyprus (46%), followed by those who believed it was bad or very bad (30%).

3.4 Predictor of Negative Attitudes

3.4.1 Gender

We conducted a number of statistical analyses to assess whether gender was predictive of negative attitudes toward refugees, THB as well as international students and migrant workers. A significant difference was found between men and women in terms of perceived negative consequences of migration, THB, prejudice toward refugees and negative attitudes toward migrant workers, such that men reported greater negativity in comparison to women. No differences were found in terms of reported acceptance levels of refugees, perceptions of refugee rights, nor knowledge on THB.

3.4.2 Age

Older age was found to be associated with increased levels of prejudice toward refugees as well as beliefs in the negative consequences of migration.

3.4.3 Education

Increased educational attainment was found to be associated with lower prejudice toward refugees and less acceptance of there being negative consequences of migration.

3.4.4 Ethnic Background

Due to the different ethnicities in our sample- mainly Turkish Cypriot, Turkish and dual nationality of Turkish Cypriot- Turkish, we wanted to see if there were any differences in attitudes based on ethnic background however no differences between the groups were obtained on any of the measured variables.

3.5 Refugee Rights Association

In order to assess extent of knowledge regarding the RRA and its activities, participants were asked whether they were familiar with the RRA. Results showed that 69% reported never hearing about the association and only 31% did. Only 8% stated knowing what kind of activities RRA organize and the majority (56%) stated no such knowledge. Lastly, participants were more likely to report unwillingness to donate to the association or show interest in internship opportunities (58% stated not likely) suggesting a reluctance in supporting the association.

4 Implications of Results

The results of this research suggests that anti-refugee, anti-immigration and anti-international student sentiments are predominant in the attitudes of 'citizens' of the northern part of Cyprus. In addition to this when we look at attitudes toward THB, it is considered to be a growing issue but myths regarding who are targets is more common, such that locals are not assumed to be involved in THB. Findings also show that people in the northern part of Cyprus are not most familiar with the RRA and its activities. This is critical information that will help the association to devise promotional activities in order to enhance awareness and harness support.

The findings of this report are most critical for policy makers and NGOs alike. By understanding the content of attitudes and prejudice, protective strategies can be established and interventions aimed at tackling these negative attitudes can be developed with the aim of promoting inclusivity, harnessing positive attitudes and protecting the human rights of vulnerable groups residing in the northern part of Cyprus.

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