Michaela Sedovic
M.Sedovicova@lse.ac.uk

Immigrant's Life Satisfaction in Europe:

Effect of Regional Attitudes towards Immigrants?

Motivation and research question

The attitudes towards immigrants (ATI) in the European countries evolved in the past decade. However, the research on the wellbeing of immigrants is lacking in explaining how these attitudes influence migrants' wellbeing (Tip et al. 2018). The presented paper aims to explore this knowledge gap. Building on the current research on wellbeing, intergroup contact, and ATI (Figure 1) and employing OLS linear regression, this paper answers the following research question and subquestions:

"Are more positive local attitudes towards immigrants (measured at subnational regional level in European countries) associated with higher life satisfaction of immigrants?

a)   Is this association different for immigrants of the first and second generation?

b)   Does this association differ with the length of stay in the receiving country?

c)   Are there differences in this association based on immigrants' country of origin?."[1]

Theoretical framework

Considering intergroup contact, the current research on the wellbeing of immigrants suggests that the intergroup contact of immigrants with the host population affects immigrants' wellbeing (Sapeha, 2014), and that the character of contact is essential. Intergroup contact is most often measured through proxies such as the heterogeneity of areas (Sapeha, 2014) or ethnic composition of neighbourhoods (Knies, Nandi & Platt, 2016). These empirical studies confirm that the different exposure to destination country population affects wellbeing; however, these proxy measures do not recognise the character of the contact. Studies examining the effect of the character of intergroup contact, such as discrimination, also confirm their effect. Relying on the self-assessment of immigrants, research studying feelings of discrimination or feelings of being accepted by the host population (Vohra & Adair 2000, Safi 2010, Kirmanoglu & Baslevent 2013) consistently support the hypothesis that lower perceived discrimination is associated with higher wellbeing and life-satisfaction. Nandi and

---

[1] The analysis for the subquestion c. is not yet finalised during the writing of this abstract.

Luthra (2018), in their research on mental health of immigrants, show negative effect of self-perceived discrimination using health markers. These measures of intergroup contact character are, however, endogenous to the self-assessed measures of wellbeing. To tackle these two issues, I engage attitudes towards immigrants as a measure of the intergroup character on top of the heterogeneity measure in the subnational regions in European countries in the analysis of immigrants' wellbeing.

Figure 1: The underlying theoretical frameworks.
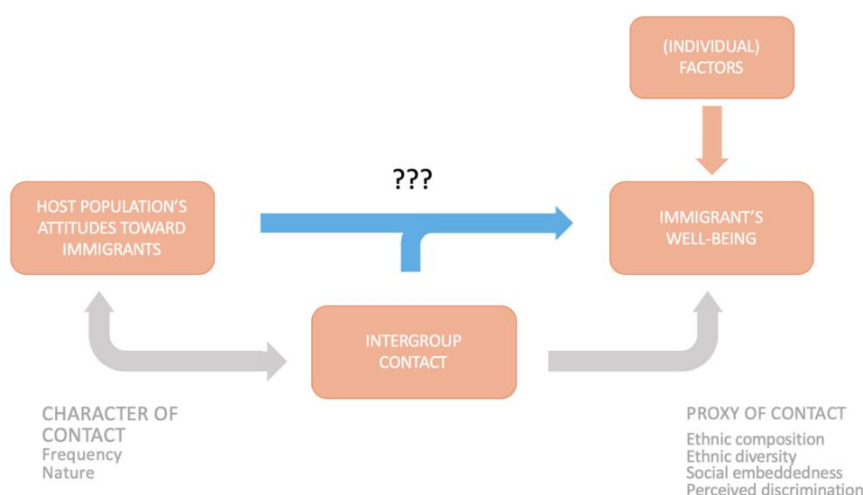
Data and methodology

The outcome variable is subjectively assessed life satisfaction measured on an 11-point scale and the main explanatory variable is a summed index of six indicators of attitudes towards immigrants, as expressed by the host population. This ATI index measured on a 4-point scale is aggregated on the regional level (NUTS2[2]) and employed in the model exploring immigrants' wellbeing in 21 European countries.[3]

This research is using three rounds of European Social Survey from the years 2012, 2014, and 2016. The sample is divided into two parts. Firstly, the destination countries' population part, which provides the data for the explanatory variable and secondly, the examined sample of

---

[2] Nomenclature of Territorial Units Statistics is a standardised geocoding system used to recognised subdivision of states in Europe for statistical purposes.
[3] Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

the first (a person born outside of the explored European country) and second generation (a person, whose at least one parent was born outside of the destination country) immigrants (*N=18055).*

The OLS regression model also includes socioeconomic and demographic variables measured on the individual level (age, gender, marital status, education level, social life, job market involvement and income); measures of time spent in the destination country (generation and years lived in the destination country) and control variables (age squared, foreign population rate in the NUTS region). The model also includes two fixed effects: destination country and dataset (ESS 2012-2016).

Expected findings

The preliminary results show that the negative attitudes in the region are associated with lower life satisfaction (Graph 1 and 2) when controlled for various socioeconomic and demographic variables (R^2=0.187).

Graph 1 and 2: OLS regression estimates from the models for the main RQ and subquestion a.
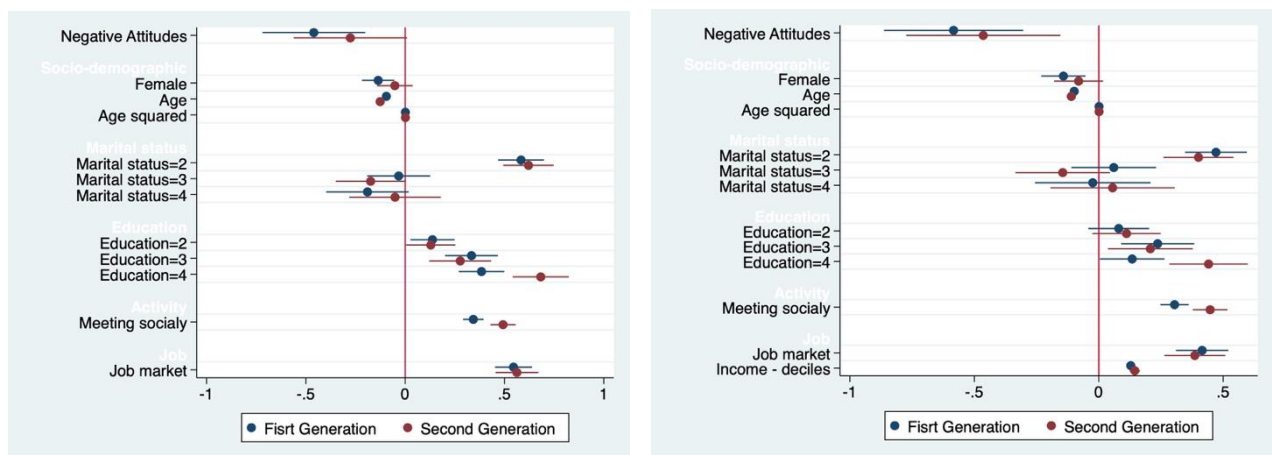
The most interesting result (examined on the first generation sample only) is the interactive effect of negative attitudes and the time spent in the destination country (Graph 3). The results suggest that with the time spent in the country, the effect of different regional attitudes eventually converges to the middle value of wellbeing, close to the values associated with the regions with average levels of ATI (2.5). The next step I am taking in this analysis is to

answer the last subquestion and differentiate between countries of origin to explore the potentially different effect of ATI on different migrant groups.

Graph 3: Linear prediction of the interactive effect from the model for the subquestion b.
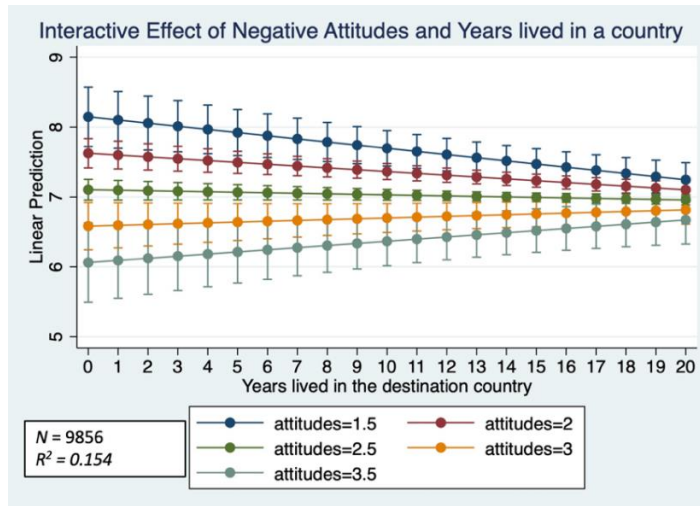
These results uncover the association between immigrants' wellbeing and the attitudes towards them in the specific geographical areas where they live in in the destination countries. These results add to our understanding of integration processes and intergroup contact effects. Further, they shed light on the effect of time spent in the country and its potential to mediate the effects of (negative) attitudes. Further research should explore this association on longitudinal data.

References

1. Knies, Gundi, Alita Nandi, and Lucinda Platt (2016) "Life satisfaction, ethnicity and neighbourhoods: Is there an effect of neighbourhood ethnic composition on life satisfaction?" *Social Science Research* 60(6): 110-124.
2. Krimanoğlu, Hasan, and Cem Başlevent (2014) "Life satisfaction of ethnic minority members: An examination of interactions with immigration, discrimination and citizenship." *Social Indicators Research* 116: 173-184.
3. Nandi, Alita, and Renee Luthra (2018) "Prevalence and Mental Health Consequences of Ethnic and Racial Harassment: A Briefing for the IOPC." *ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change*, HE18/E03.
4. Safi, Mirna (2010) "Immigrants' Life Satisfaction in Europe: Between Assimilation and Discrimination". *European Sociological Review*, 26(2): 159–176.
5. Sapeha Halina (2014) "Explaining Variations in Immigrants' Satisfaction with Their Settlement Experience." *International Migration & Integration,* 16: 891–910.
6. Tip, Linda K, Rupert Brown, Linda, Morrice, Michael Collyer, and Mathew J. Easterbrook (2019) "Improving refugee well-being with better language skills and more intergroup contact." *Social Psychological and Personality Science,* 10(2):144–151.
7. Vohra, Neharika, and John Adair (2000) "Life satisfaction of Indian immigrants in Canada." *Psychology Developing Societies*, 12(2): 109–138.