

Study: Liberal asylum and refugee policies do not reduce domestic security, increase violent crime

May 5 2021



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Ahead of US President Joe Biden's plan later this month to lift the country's historically low cap on asylum seekers, a new political study finds that liberal, progressive refugee policies do not pose domestic

security challenges for states.

The study, which is published in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* and focused on Europe and North America between 2014-17, concludes that the claim long-perpetuated about the internal security risks posed by liberal [asylum](#) policies are unsubstantiated by the evidence for homicide and violent [crime](#).

Its analysis finds that countries with higher levels of refugees per population also have lower levels of violent crime. By comparison, countries with strict, restrictive asylum policies (i.e. those countries that take in the least numbers of [asylum seekers](#)) have higher levels of crime and homicide.

Researchers, Professor Timo Kivimäki (University of Bath, UK) and Leah Nicholson (York University, Canada) acknowledge that significant other factors contribute towards a nation's violent crime statistics, for example gun control, and relative poverty. However, they stress that from this analysis there is no evidence of a causal link between accepting refugees and violent crime increasing.

Professor Kivimäki from the University of Bath's [Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies](#) explains: "Our analysis which compared countries in Europe and North America demonstrates that the argument put forward that progressive asylum policies leads to increased violent crime within societies is simply incorrect. Instead, we find that those compassionate countries—those most willing to accept refugees—also have the lowest levels of homicide. This is important evidence to challenge a long-perpetuated myth put forward in countries on both sides of the Atlantic.

"Of course, other significant factors must be considered in reducing a country's rate of violent crime—notably topics such as gun control. But

crucially, we show that progressive, liberal [refugee](#) policies are not the threat that many have painted them as. Countries that are more compassionate towards refugees tend to be more compassionate towards each other and there is no causal path between accepting refugees and increased domestic security troubles."

Their study looked at asylum and refugee policies across 39 nations against crime and violence statistics. The analysis highlights that the three states to receive the greatest number of refugees per population—Germany, Malta, and Sweden—were also among the least violent countries in the West. By comparison, Ukraine, US and Lithuania, the three most homicidal countries, each received far fewer refugees per population than most of Western countries.

The research reveals certain exceptions for countries with lower than average numbers of refugees—Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Portugal—where violent crime has been avoided. However, it finds no country with generous refugee policies that has serious problems with violent crime.

Professor Kivimäki explains that building compassion in society is essential to tackling this debate. "From our study we see that emphasizing the value of human life without exception reduces [violent crime](#). Respect for the lives of refugees and country's own people goes hand in hand. One way to start to increase these values must be to stop claiming that compassionate policies towards refugees costs lives," he adds.

More information: Timo Kivimäki et al. Refugee Crisis, Valuation of Life, and Violent Crime, *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/jrs/feaa072](https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa072)

Provided by University of Bath

Citation: Study: Liberal asylum and refugee policies do not reduce domestic security, increase violent crime (2021, May 5) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-05-liberal-asylum-refugee-policies-domestic.html>

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