

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Republic of Finland



A Bakamo Public  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

- 2019 -



Introduction | FI

Context of the Finnish migration discourse

The Republic of Finland is a **Nordic country in Northern Europe** which is situated between Norway to the north, Sweden to the northwest, and Russia to the east. As of 2015, Finland had a **population of 5,471,753**. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 0.23% of the population**.

The public social media conversation in Finland around migration in one year consists of **~12,390 posts**. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in the country is the 17th largest in the EU**.

The Finnish government is led by **Prime Minister Juha Sipilä**, who was re-elected into office in 2015. The **Centre Party of Finland**, a centrist, **liberal, political party, holds the majority of seats**, followed by the National Coalition Party, SDP and the Finns Party.

In reaction to mounting domestic pressure following the unprecedented influx of migrants in 2015, **Finnish government has shifted its stance on migration to favor more restrictive asylum policies**. Today, migration policies are framed around the Nordic welfare state. Consequently, Finland has created a heavily bureaucratic system of reception and relocation which prioritizes orderly processing and control of migration.



*Source: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org>



Introduction | FI

The Finish Context: *Politics & Migration*

To understand the conversations and sentiment surrounding the migration discussion in Finland, one must note the influence of the **country's limited experience with migration** and the **importance the nordic welfare state** has in society.

Finland is home to one of the world's most extensive welfare systems, as it guarantees the **universal provision of services by the state to all residents of Finland, including migrants**. This system is based on the principle of universalism, an idea that all citizens, regardless of background, are entitled to full social citizenship rights and benefits in order to maximize societal integration and labour force participation. Consequently, the establishment of the welfare model was not only an economic process, but also lead to the construction of **national identity rooted in policy**.

For Finland, the welfare state is the center of gravity, especially in the context of migration. Due to relatively little experience with migration prior to 2015, **Finland's migration policies were created within the system of this heavily bureaucratic welfare model** in order to have an orderly reception of a small number of migrants. As a consequence, **Finland's infrastructure was quickly overwhelmed during the 2015 refugee crisis** when it experienced a 10-fold increase in the number of asylum seekers from the previous year. Although the number of refugees was small by comparison to other countries, migration policy quickly became a key political issue in Finland. Politicians were using the topic to fuel an unusually divisive debate over identity.

**Source: Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka & Ylä-Anttila, Tuomas. (2015). Exploiting the Discursive Opportunity of the Euro Crisis: The Rise of The Finns Party*



Key Findings | FI

How and Where Do Finns Discuss Migration On Social Media?

Size of Pan-European Narratives

The largest narratives within the migration conversation in Finland are the **humanitarianism** and **security** narratives. Today, security and humanitarianism can be understood as two sides of the same coin: the same events are discussed, but from two completely different perspectives.

Local Issues

Finnish national identity is strongly entwined with the idea of the **welfare state**. This was illustrated in 2015 when anxiety over an influx of migrants was followed by calls of Finnish politicians to exclude migrants from receiving benefits.

EU & Domestic Politics

Migration is predominantly seen as a **local issue**. This is, in large part, due to Finns' historical emphasis on crafting policies tailored specifically to the population's own values and needs.

Conversation Tone

The Finnish migration conversation is characterized by a **neutral tone**, throughout all of the narratives. The most passionate discussions tend to occur within the demographic and identity and customs narratives.

Conversation Channels

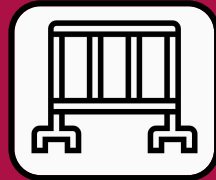
Twitter is the main avenue used to discuss migration in Finland, followed by blogs and online news outlets. This media usage reflects a high level of engagement amongst Finnish citizens. However, online news sparks the most engagement.



Pan-European Narratives: *The Cyprus Context*



Within the context of humanitarianism, the largest narrative in the Finnish migration conversation, both anti and pro-migrant voices engage in discussions concerning migrants' access to Finnish welfare state benefits, as well as opinions on international cooperation.



Both pro and anti-migrant voices expressed concern over undocumented migrants, especially in the context of increased negative asylum decisions. Pro-migrant voices tend to push back on securitization narratives by insisting that the real security threat lies in a divided Finnish society.



Social inclusion is seen as the primary mechanism for successful integration, and has been tied into national identity.



As a result of Finland developing its migration policies within the framework of its welfare system, migrants are seen in the context of either contributing to or taking away from the welfare state.



Within the demographics narrative, migration is often discussed in the context of Finland's "dependency ratio". The majority of conversations discuss the potential net impact migrants could have on the labour market and public economy, compared to a native worker.

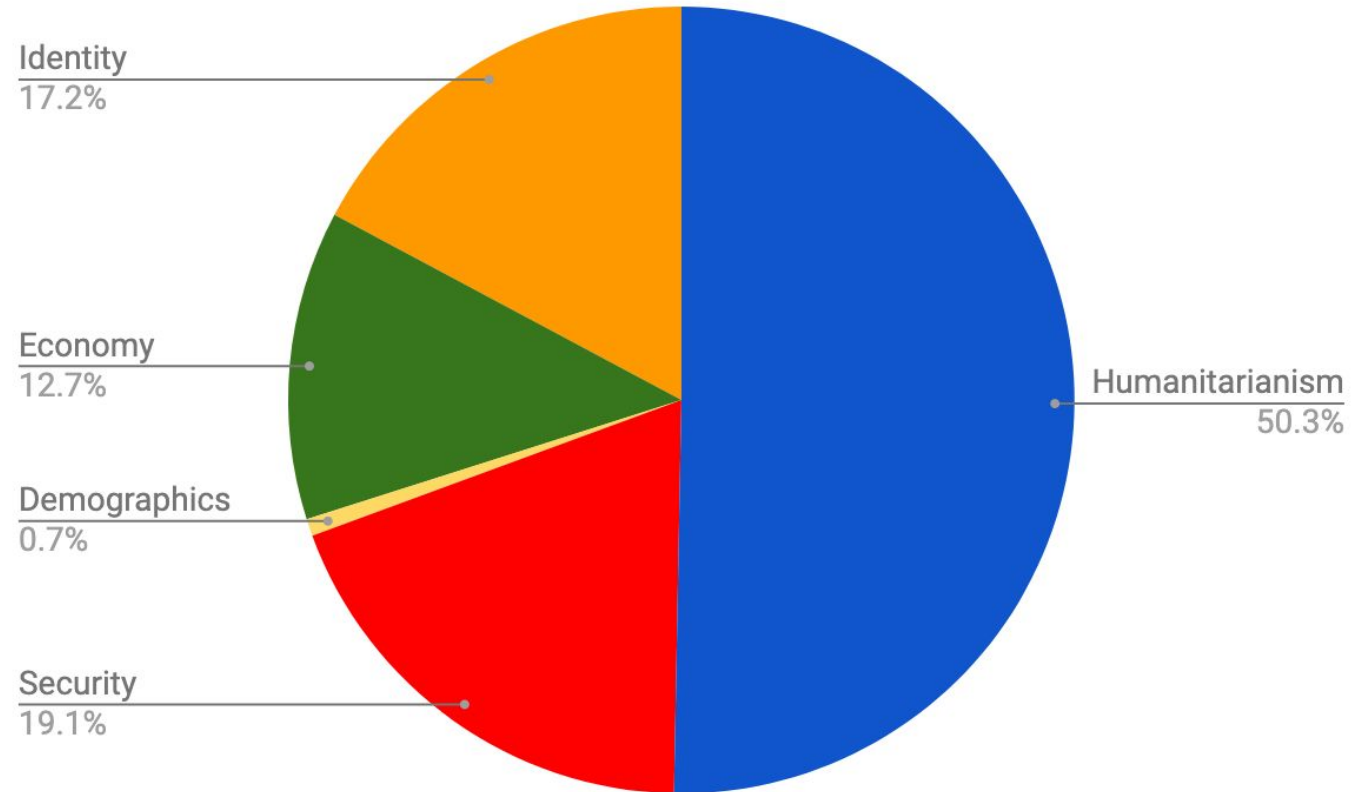
+ *Pan-European Narratives in Finland*

1.

Pan-European Narratives | FI

Narrative Sizes in Finland

Within the Finnish migration conversation, the most commonly discussed topic took place within the Humanitarianism narrative, as it centered on the realisation of migrants' rights.





The shape of the migration discourse

The majority of narratives tend to spike when Finns express dissatisfaction with the Finnish asylum application process. Other spikes appear due to numerous conversations about specific politicians, as well as debates involving conflicting stances on migration.

Overall Results:

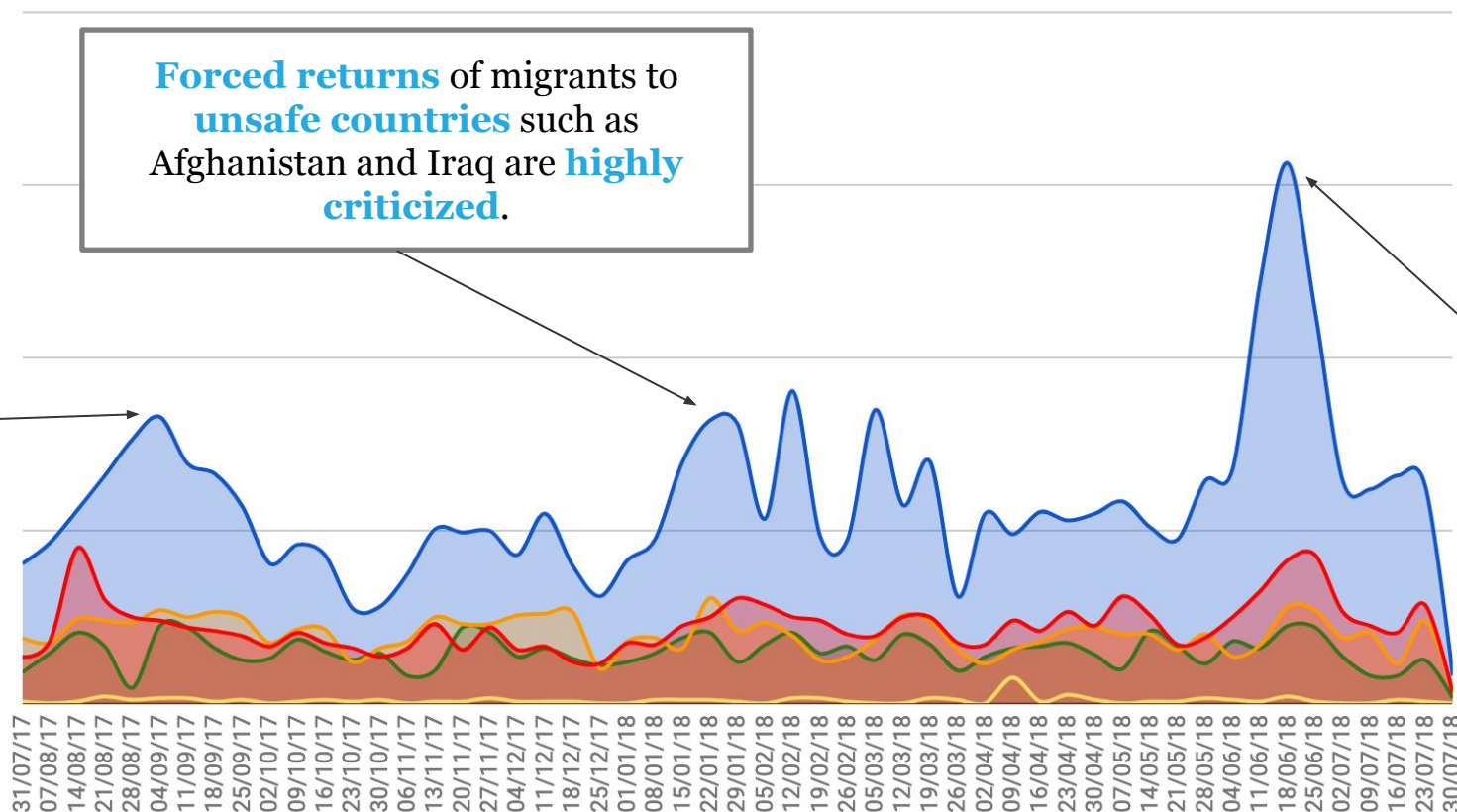
~12,390

Demographics Economy Humanitarianism Identity Security

Forced returns of migrants to **unsafe countries** such as Afghanistan and Iraq are **highly criticized**.

Problems in the **Finnish asylum application** review process were discussed under the hashtag **#pakolaisoikeus** (**#refugeelaw**)

Interior Minister Mykkänen's commissioned report points to **problems in interpreter services** that could affect the outcome of some asylum applications, as well as the need for **additional border security** measures





Pan-European Narratives | FI

Peak Analysis: Narrative Comparison

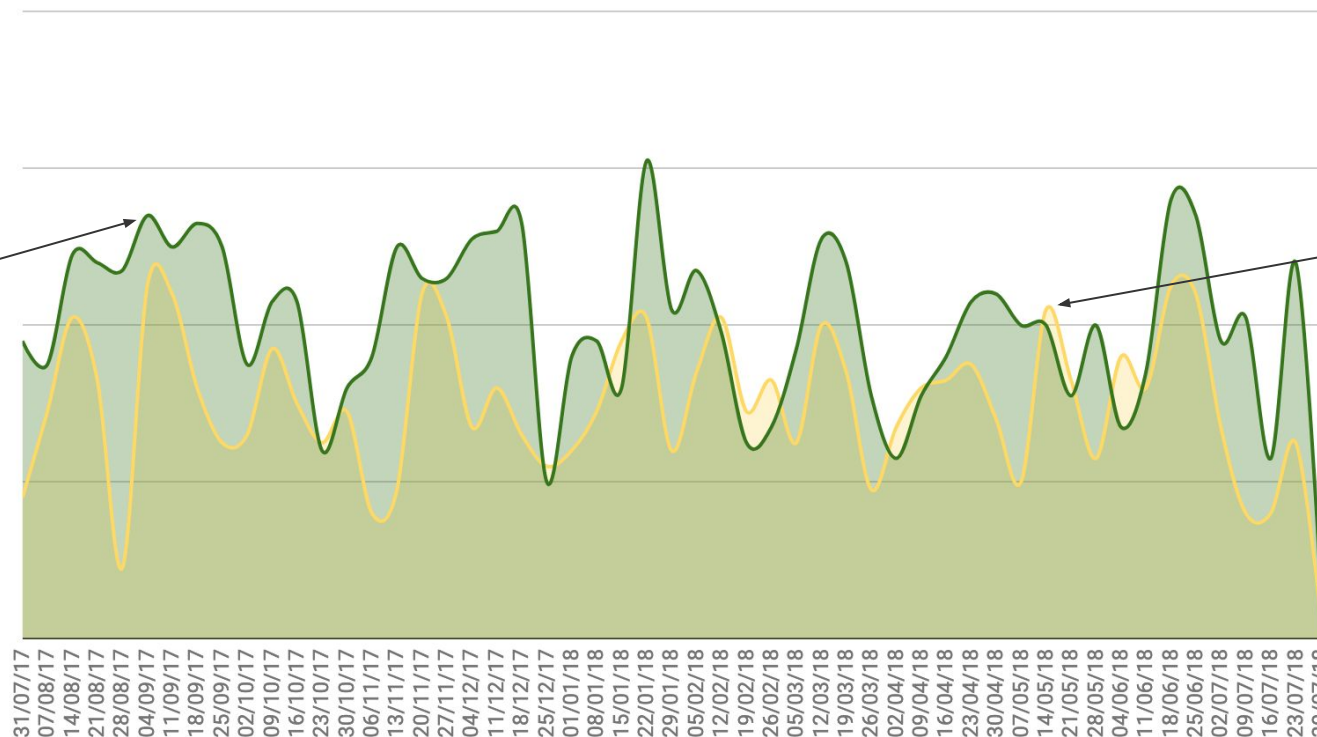
Finland's migration policies are situated within its expansive welfare system. As such, social inclusion through employment is seen as the primary mechanism for successful integration, and has also been tied into national identity. Consequently, the identity and economy narratives tend to peak along the same timeline.

Identity Results: ~2130

Economy Results: ~1570

■ Economy ■ Identity

“Refugee support also believes that **language-based social orientation should also be statutory** and the content of education should be determined nationwide according to certain quality criteria.”



“The **most rewarding thing** is when **people find jobs** and see that they really **integrate into Finland...**”

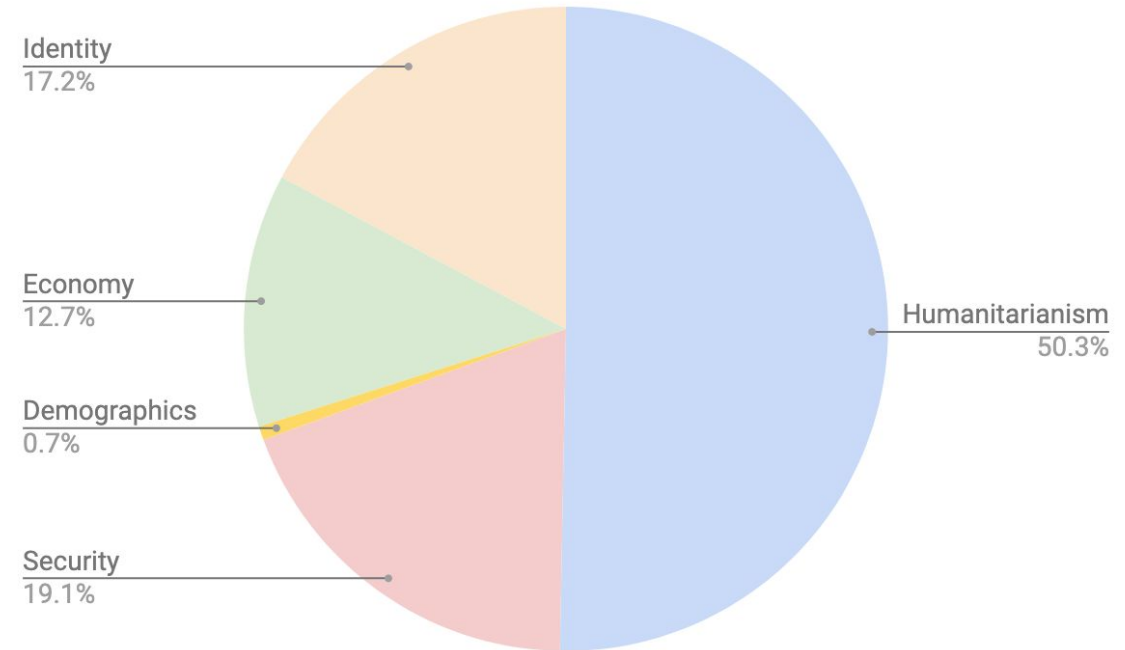
Pan-European Narratives | FI

Demographics (1): *Key Points*

Within the demographics narrative, migration is often discussed in the context of Finland's “**dependency ratio**”, that is, the number of those aged 15 or under and 65 or over per 100 working-age persons.* While conversations reflect a general awareness that, due to an aging population and declining birth rate, Finland is in the midst of a demographic shift, knowledge of how these changes impact economic growth and stability is fragmented.

The majority of conversations compare the potential net impact a migrant could have on the labour market and public economy, compared to a native worker. Many anti-migrant supporters believe that the net impacts on public sector depends strongly on the background of the migrant, skill level, and reason for migration (humanitarian or economic).

Results:
~90 (0.7%)



*Source: https://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2017/vaerak_2017_2018-03-29_tie_001_en.html



Pan-European Narratives | FI

Demographics (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The dependency ratio will correct itself

*The **dependency ratio corrects itself** with time when the generation difference is leveling off. Seizing the problem otherwise would only end the problem indefinitely. And not many of them will help. **Only some European immigrants are a net positive factor.***

European migrants will provide the labour we need, we don't need to accept refugees

There is no point in worrying about the dependency ratio.** As a result of climate change, we **will have so many migrants from southern Europe that the maintenance ratio will remain high.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants can help ease the impact of an aging population

*...**there are more young people in the world than ever before**, however, at the same time the **population of Europe is aging**. It's good to **keep that in mind** when we are **discussing global migration**.*

Migrants fill the jobs we don't want

Strawberries would rot on the ground if we didn't have workers from outside EU/ETA to pick them.

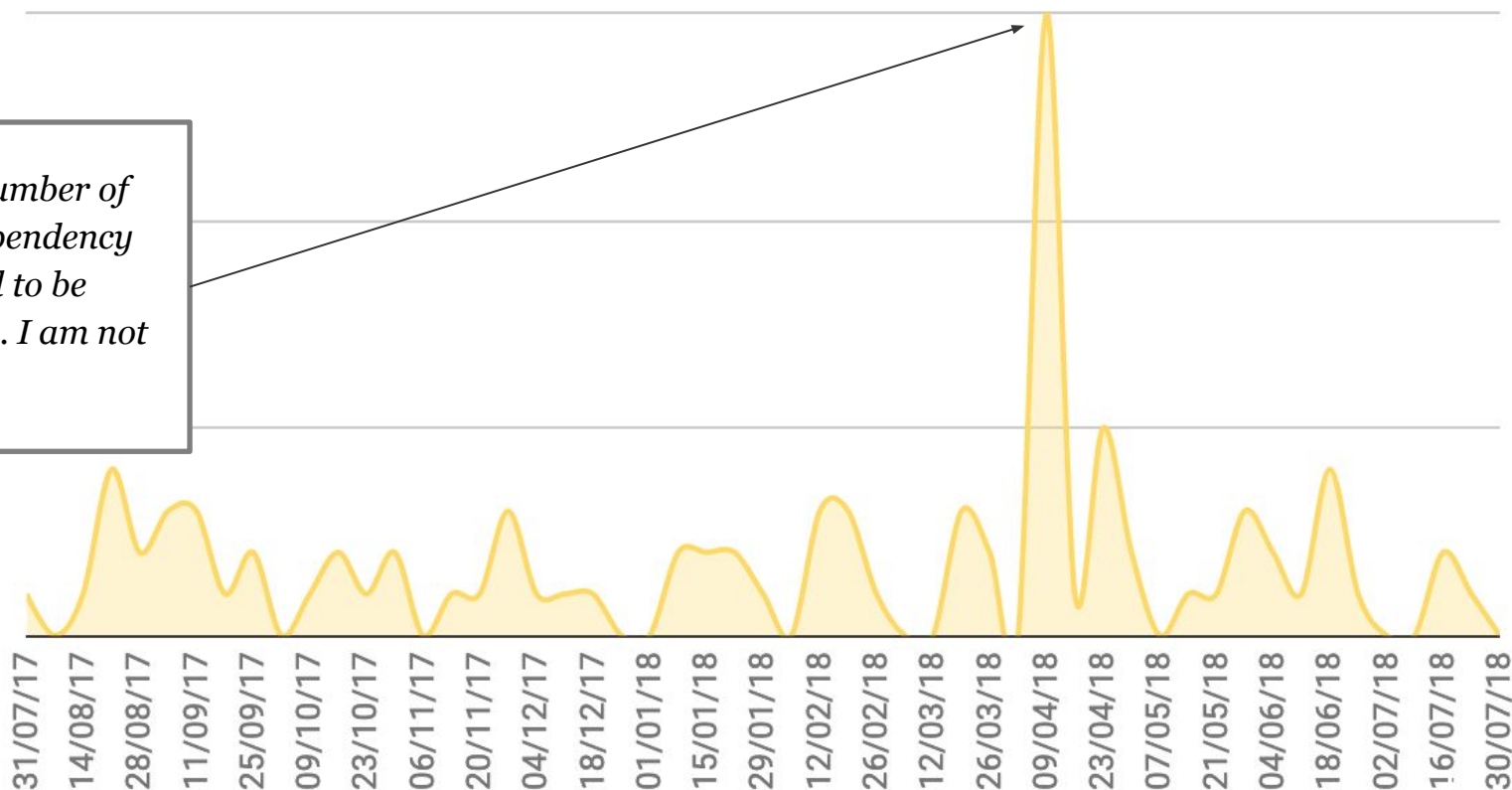
Pan-European Narratives | FI

Demographics (3): *Conversation Peaks*

Conversations are spiked by reports related to demographic changes and their economic consequences in Finland.

Results: ~90 (0.7%)

"(...)When the number of children goes down, the number of people outside the labor force decreases and the dependency ratio improves. The impact of migration is expected to be neutral, as well as the impact of increasing lifespan. I am not worried about decreasing birth rates."



Demographics

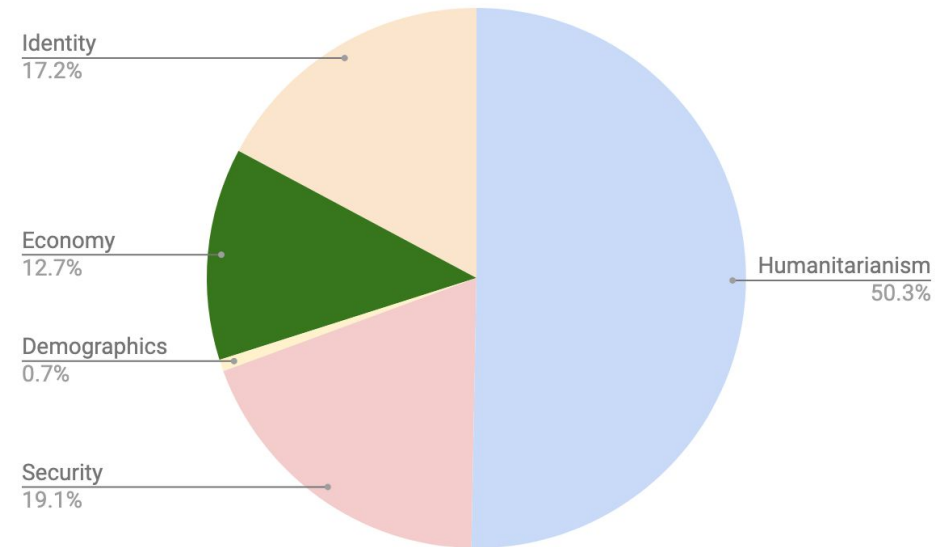
Pan-European Narratives | FI

Economy (1): *Key Points*

As a result of Finland developing its migration policies within the framework of its welfare system, many Finns link migrants to concerns about the welfare state. Many anti-migrant voices point out that the current system was set up to meet the needs of a relatively small population – as such, an influx of migrants could put too much pressure on the social systems which could lead to catastrophic economic consequences. Anti-migrant Finns are also highly skeptical of the motives behind those politicians' who advocate for increasing Finland's EU refugee quota, believing the true motives to be more corruption rooted in personal gain.

Pro-migrant voices counter this narrative by asserting the foundation of the Finnish welfare system, the principle of universalism, actually protects the system from being overwhelmed by an influx of migrants. Indeed, it is actually vital to the economy that the government creates programs and initiatives which extend Finnish welfare benefits to incoming migrants in order to support and maximize labour force participation.

Results:
~1570 (12.7%)





Pan-European Narratives | FI Economy (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants will overburden our social services and cost us too much money

*If you read the article it becomes clear that **migrants are a burden for the Finnish economy**. They **use social services more than they pay taxes**.*

Refugee costs reported as “development aid” in Finland is reported to be more than three times of the previous year.

Politicians are profiting from migration

*Unfortunately, the **national coalition party and the Social democrats are blocking the great initiative**. It is just simply too good business for them, **they are just pocketing government money and using migrants as their cover-up**.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Programs supporting access to the labour market allow migrants to contribute to society

*“**Our goal is to educate and to integrate 2500 migrants into the labor market quickly**. Currently around 500 migrants and refugees are part of the program, and almost 150 of them have secured a job.”*

*I want to **ensure that as many refugees are seen as a work / training member of society**, rather than live on welfare payments and devoid of any purpose.*

Migrants are not here to take your jobs

*“**The fear of the other is fading**. Nearly half of the Finnish population wants more migrants into the country. **Maybe people have understood that migrants are not coming here to steal their jobs.**”*

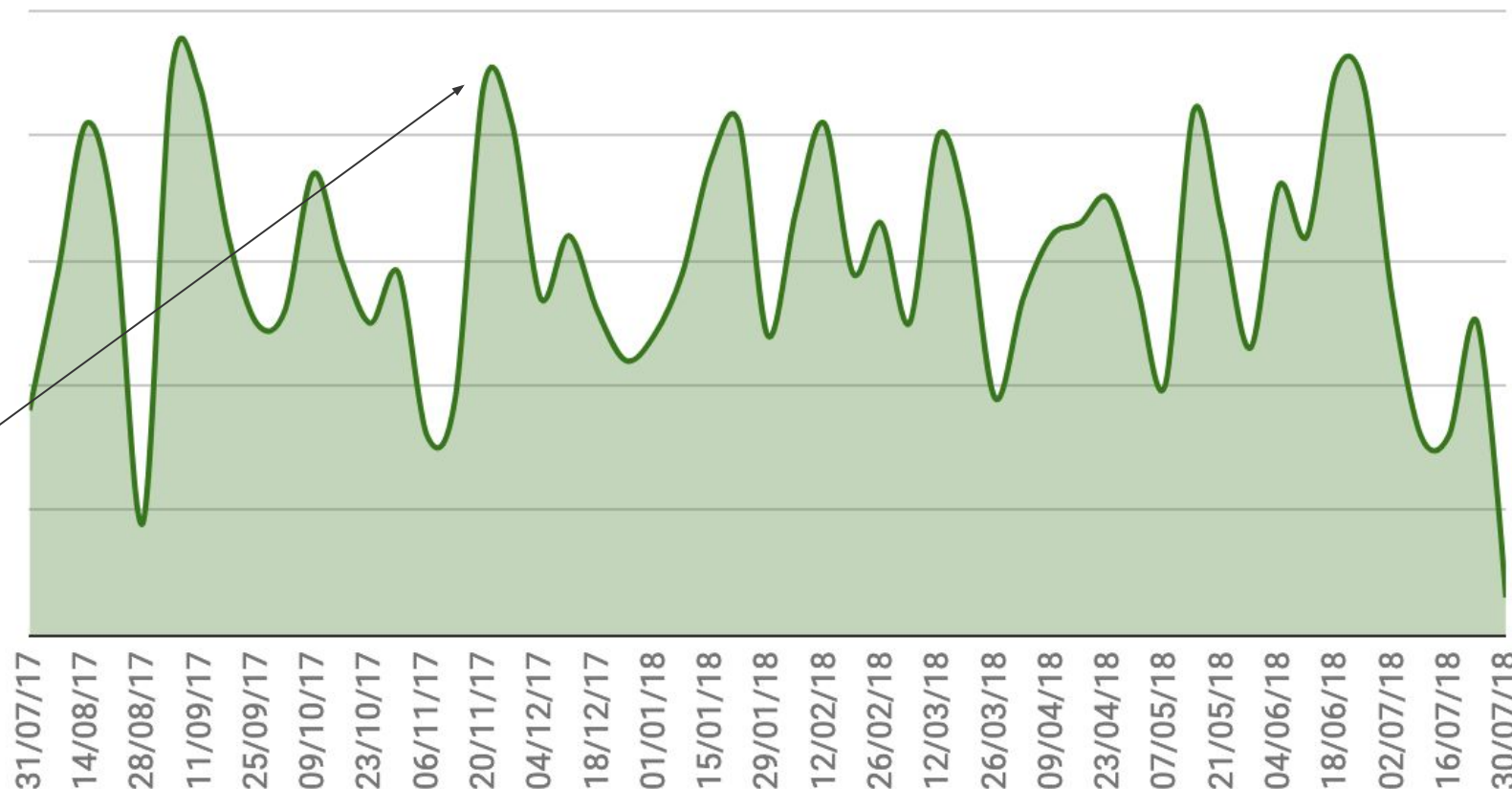
Pan-European Narratives | FI

Economy (3): *Conversation Peaks*

Many anti-immigration bloggers concentrate on the financial burden of accepting more refugees. Finland's economy has slumped in recent years.

Results: ~2,100 (12.7%)

A proposed policy change to make it easier to get cheap labor from abroad sparked criticism as it was perceived to favor foreign workers at the expense of Finnish workers.



Economy

Pan-European Narratives | FI

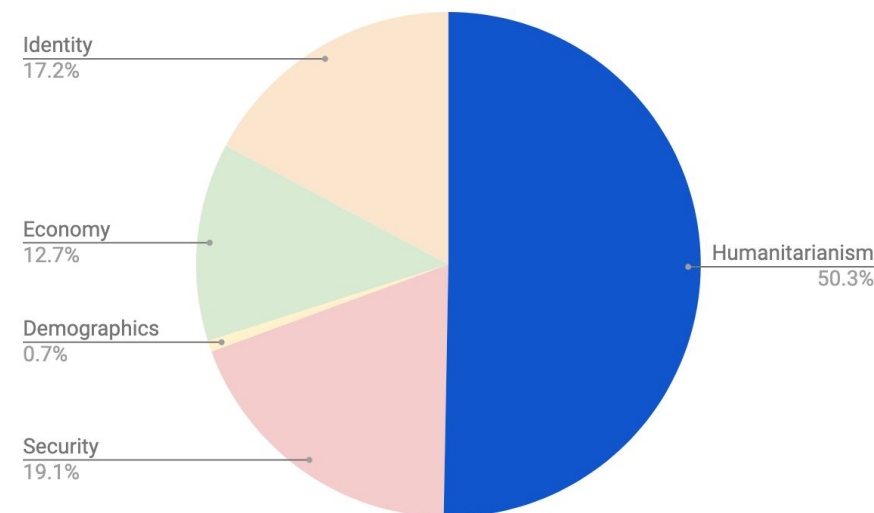
Humanitarianism (1): *Key Points*

Within the context of humanitarianism, both anti and pro-migrant voices engage in discussions about migrants' access to Finnish welfare state benefits, as well as opinions on international cooperation. These conversations tend to cluster around topics like politics, policies, and asylum processes, which is largely a result of Finland placing migration procedures within the framework of the bureaucratic Finnish welfare state.

Pro-migrant voices tend to focus on the protection of migrants' rights, and criticize deportation practices and asylum application process in general. These users often discuss migrants as potential contributors and assets to their host societies, a view supported by egalitarian principles embedded in Finland's welfare state ideologies and legislation.

Anti-migrant voices often expressed the belief that migrants were not in real need, but rather had come to benefit from Finland's generous welfare system. Finnish political rhetoric and policy making include strong resistance towards providing welfare benefits for those deemed not to be in real need. Such claims were exacerbated by general mismanagement in the asylum process.

Results:
~6230 (50.3%)





Pan-European Narratives | FI

Humanitarianism (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Selective humanitarianism: Finland is not receiving the real migrants in need

*I get so angry when I read about these so called 'refugees'. **I doubt if any of the Afghans arriving to Finland are actually from Afghanistan?** Because they certainly don't seem like they would be refugees. #imbecileland #refugees #Iran*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Finland must reform its Asylum Procedure to make it more humane

***EU Court last week had an excellent solution:** in the future, the right to family reunification of a child will be determined by the age at the time of entry, not at the time of decision-making. Therefore, it is no longer possible to obtain a negative decision [for asylum] because [the child is no longer under 18]."*

*I've said many times before, that the **Finnish refugee and immigration policy is broken. It is short-sighted, it breaks families, it is not humane** and does not serve the interests of society.*



Pan-European Narratives | FI

Humanitarianism (3): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The current process for Finnish Asylum Procedure is unsustainable

*The **proposed refugee quotas** would simply be **unsustainable**. The most important immediate solution would be to **move the whole asylum process outside of the EU**, so that it would become significantly harder to abuse the system.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

It is our obligation to assist migrants

*Most of the refugees seek refuge from their neighboring countries. **If we cut development aid, we lose our ability to help them**. Some people do not want to help refugees far or near - they just simply do not want to help at all. Ultimately this is a matter of will. **#presidentialelections2018***

*@Sallapeltonen RT: **How can we send refugees, especially children, back to where we warn our citizens from going?***

Pan-European Narratives | FI

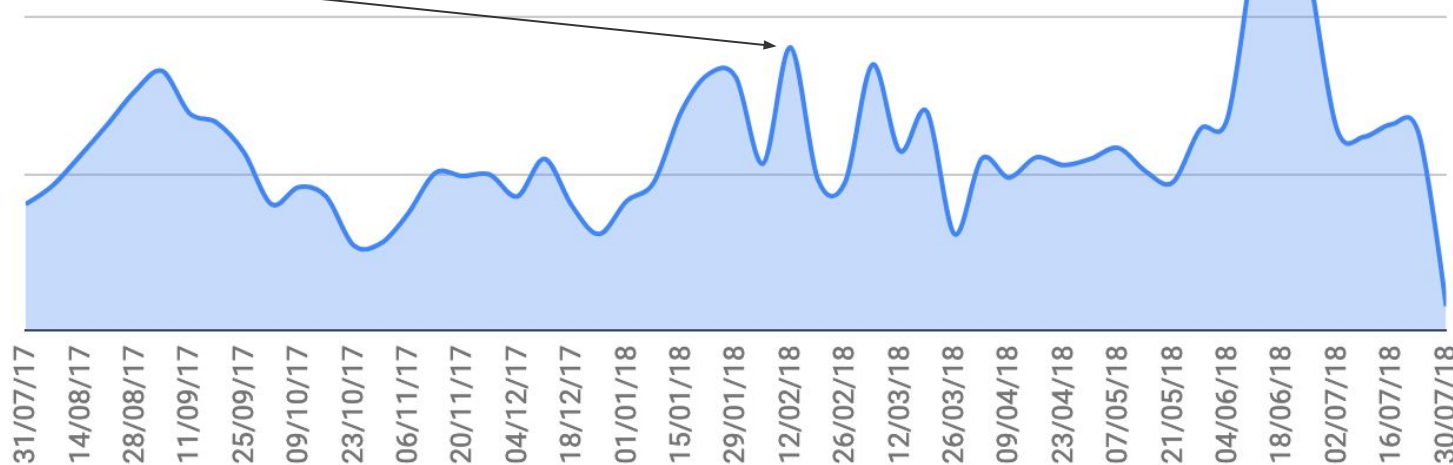
Humanitarianism (4): *Conversation Peaks*

Conversations tend to inspire the highest engagement when Finns are discussing recent administrative or policy outcomes related to migration.

Results: ~6230 (50.3%)

EU Court last week's excellent decision: in the future, the right to family reunification of a child will be determined by the age at the time of entry, not at the time of decision-making.

Interior Minister Mykkänen's commissioned report prompts Justice Ministry to "conduct a separate analysis of how well migration officials have upheld practices relating to legal aid and safeguarding the rights of the individual."



Humanitarianism

Pan-European Narratives | FI

Identity and Customs (1): *Key Points*

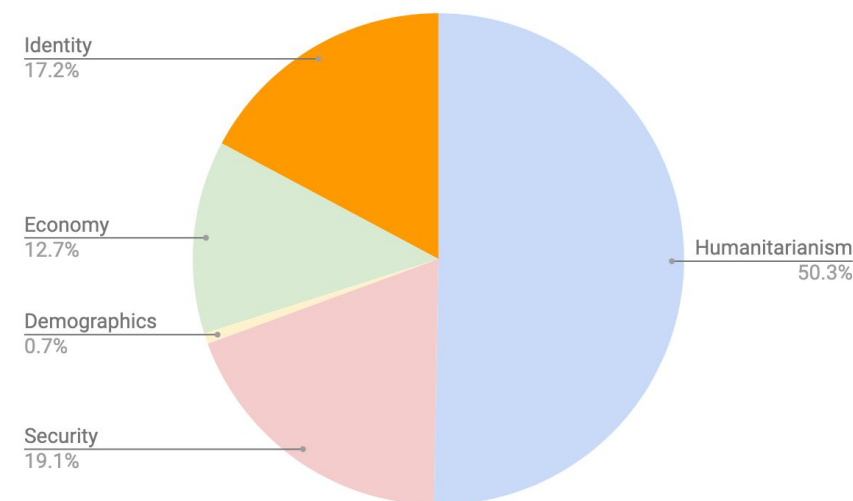
Within the context of the welfare system in Finland, social inclusion is seen as the primary mechanism for successful integration. In this way, the establishment of the welfare model was not only an economic and social process, but was also about constructing national identities. Historically, this national identity has been used by political actors to promote cooperation and build mutual trust.

Today **pro-migrant** voices advocate for policies which seek to support migrants transition into Finnish society by creating procedures and services at the local level.

However, **anti-migrant** parties, such as the Finns party, have evoked shared principles rooted in national identity to construct narratives which explain how and why migrants should be excluded from certain welfare benefits.

A key concern for both pro and anti-migrant voices was **knowledge of the host-country language**, as it is often seen as the key factor for successful integration. This is particularly true in Finland, where language skills are fundamental to social acceptance and employment.

Results: ~2130 (17.2%)





Pan-European Narratives | FI

Identity and Customs (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Welfare Chauvinism: exclusion based on identity

The city of Turku should not aim to become more and more multicultural, but instead offer migrants the necessary resources to adopt Finnish language and culture.

The onus to integrate is on the migrant

*...the **integration strategy should be changed** so that the integration is achieved through **teaching migrants about Finnish social customs and identity**, not emphasizing differences of migrants, or even glorifying them.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Language is essential to successful integration

***Language constructs reality.** The term 'second generation' migrant is mostly used to describe only people of color. For example **we do not use the term to describe a child of a Swedish migrant.** #mediacriticismoftheday*

*"...**language is the knife that the individual uses to cut the cake of society into his own!**...The Finnish as a second language course has the ambition and resources to reach a sufficient level with migrants coming to Finland."*

Integration has the most success when there are structures in place to assist with the transition

*The **municipality of Hämeenkyrö** has **enabled** Alier and other **young migrants to find a quick route to Finnish life.** Jaana Simi praises the municipality's swift action.*

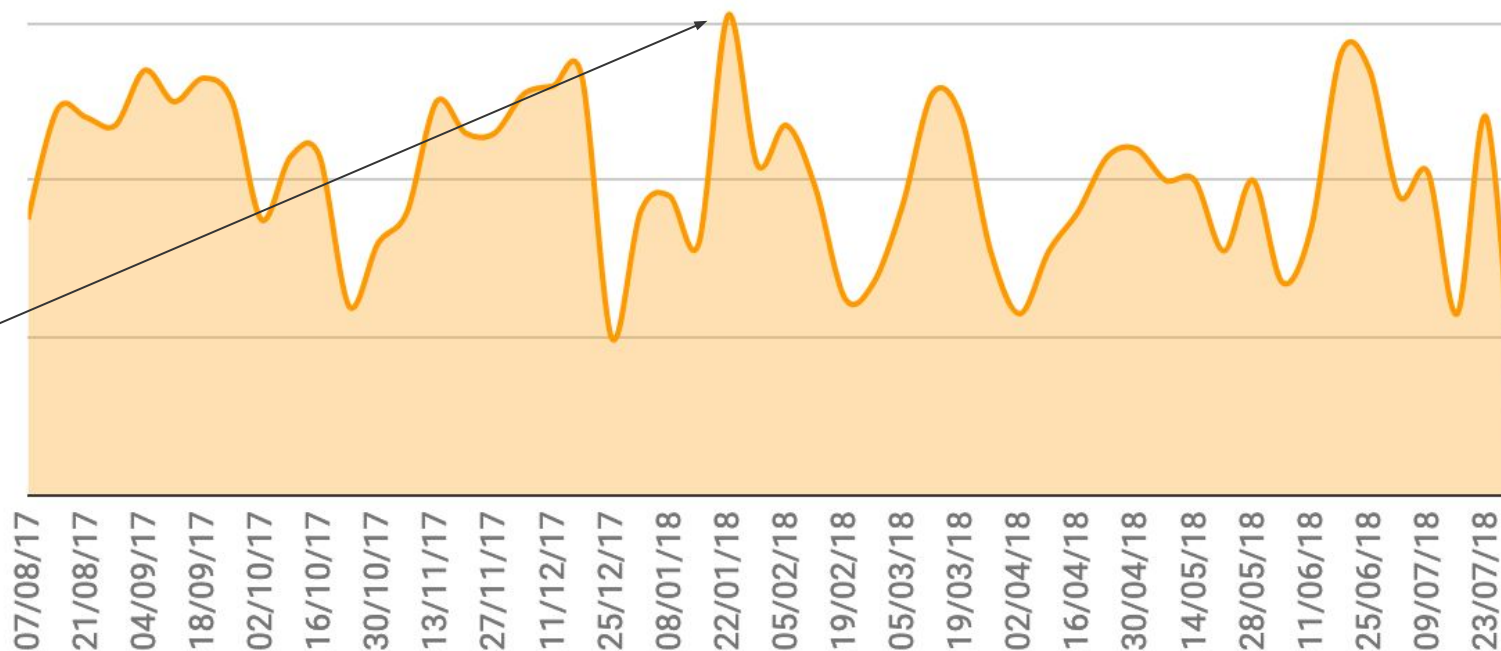


Identity and Customs (3): *Conversation Peaks*

Conversations within the identity and customs narrative tend to correlate with conversation trends in the economy, security, and humanitarian narratives.

Results: ~2130 (17.2%)

Discussion about the term 'second generation migrant' and how the concept is mostly used to describe people of color only, while migrants coming from Sweden for example, are accepted as Finns much easier.



Identity

Pan-European Narratives | FI

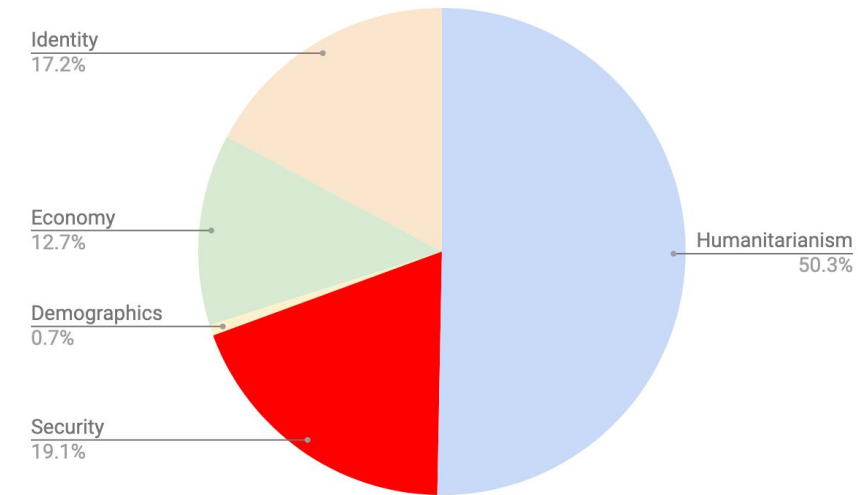
Security (1): *Key Points*

Both pro and anti-migrant voices expressed concern over undocumented migrants, especially in the context of increased negative asylum decisions. Some politicians suggested that the asylum seekers who receive a negative asylum decision should be detained until their return to their home country, while others fear undocumented migrants to be at bigger risk of human trafficking and violence.

Many anti-migrant voices link the presence of migrants from Muslim-majority countries to increases in violent and sexual crime, as well as an increased risk of terrorism. The majority of these concerns are followed with calls to make certain procedures within the asylum process more strict, and to increase appropriations to relevant agencies.

Pro-migrant voices discussed the importance of solidarity and the need to make asylum policies more effective without jeopardizing human rights. They also push back on the securitization narrative by insisting that the real security threat lies in a divided Finnish society.

Results:
~2370 (19.1%)





Pan-European Narratives | FI

Security (2): Quotes

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

The Asylum procedure must be improved in order to control borders

*The **40,000 applications of the first migrant wave have not been processed** in two years, and **politicians are not giving any extra resources to improve the process**. The case in **Turku shows** that a Moroccan petty criminal mislead the Finnish, German and Swedish authorities as he pleased...the "helpless" and "non-linguist" in Morocco will mislead the system...and then be able to **commit terrorist acts**.... I can say with good reason that the situation is not at all under the control of the authorities.*

*In Pekan's view, **uncontrolled asylum policy has led Finland to have made one kind of speed record for the weakening of its own nation's security**. - I do not see any light in this development.*

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

A Finnish society that is divided poses the biggest security threat

*If ever, now is the time to build bridges not walls! We have to stop this competition in which countries try to beat each other in building border fences between us and them. **There is no us and them - there are only humans, and human safety should always be the number one priority.***

*Finally the government said out loud what I have been talking about for a while already; **the worst security threat for the country is not migrants but the marginalization and social exclusion of Finnish people.***

*...**what makes me feel safe is that migrants**, our friends, **were the first ones to come to our rescue**. We all witnessed that. We are one. #turku"*

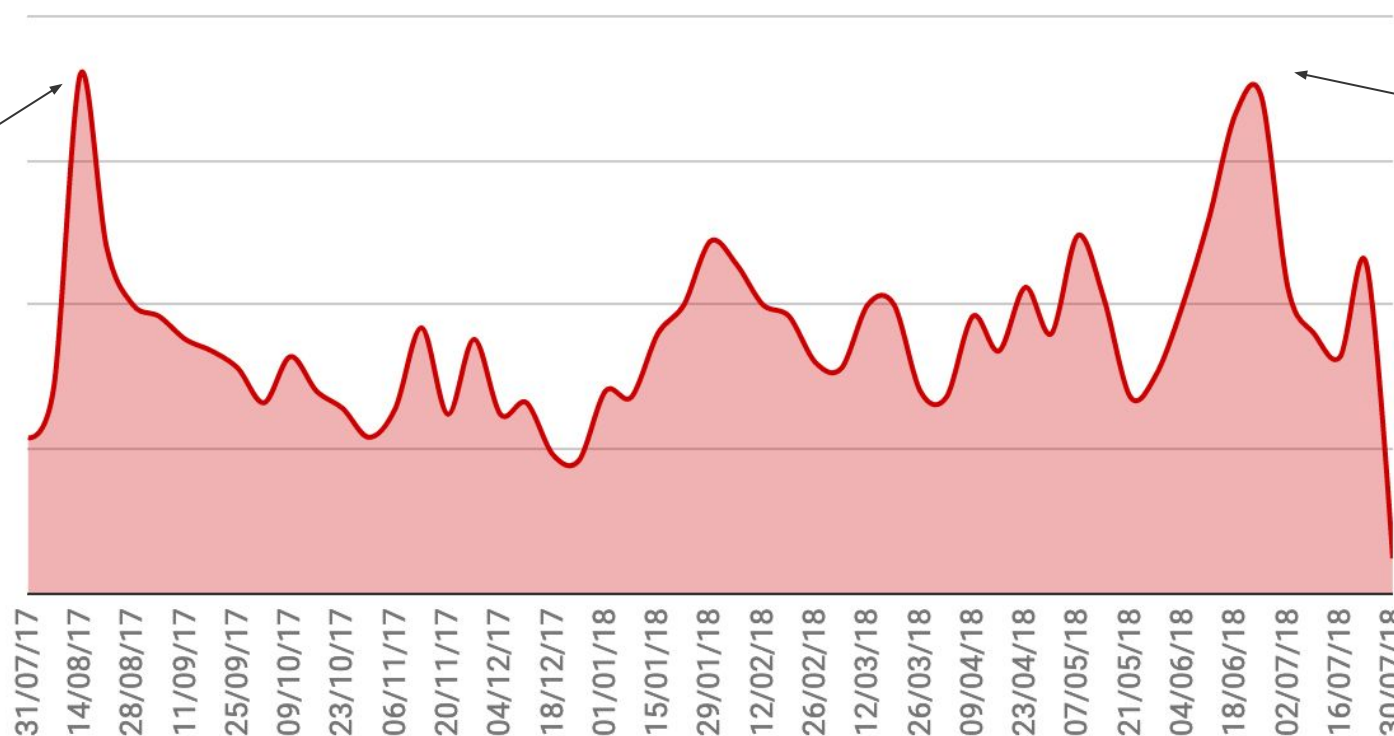
Pan-European Narratives | FI

Security (3): Conversation Peaks

Challenges caused by the increase of negative asylum decisions and the rise in the number of undocumented migrants spiked conversations. The Turku attack was seen as an apt example of how lax security measures could lead to disastrous consequences.

Results: ~2355 (19.1%)

The **first terrorist attack in Finland**. Moroccan immigrant stabbed ten people in the city of Turku, killing two.



“At the European Council meeting, EU leaders confirmed the need for a more effective control of the EU's external borders to improve returns and provide a high level of security within the Union.”

Security

+ *Local Issues in Finland Around Migration*



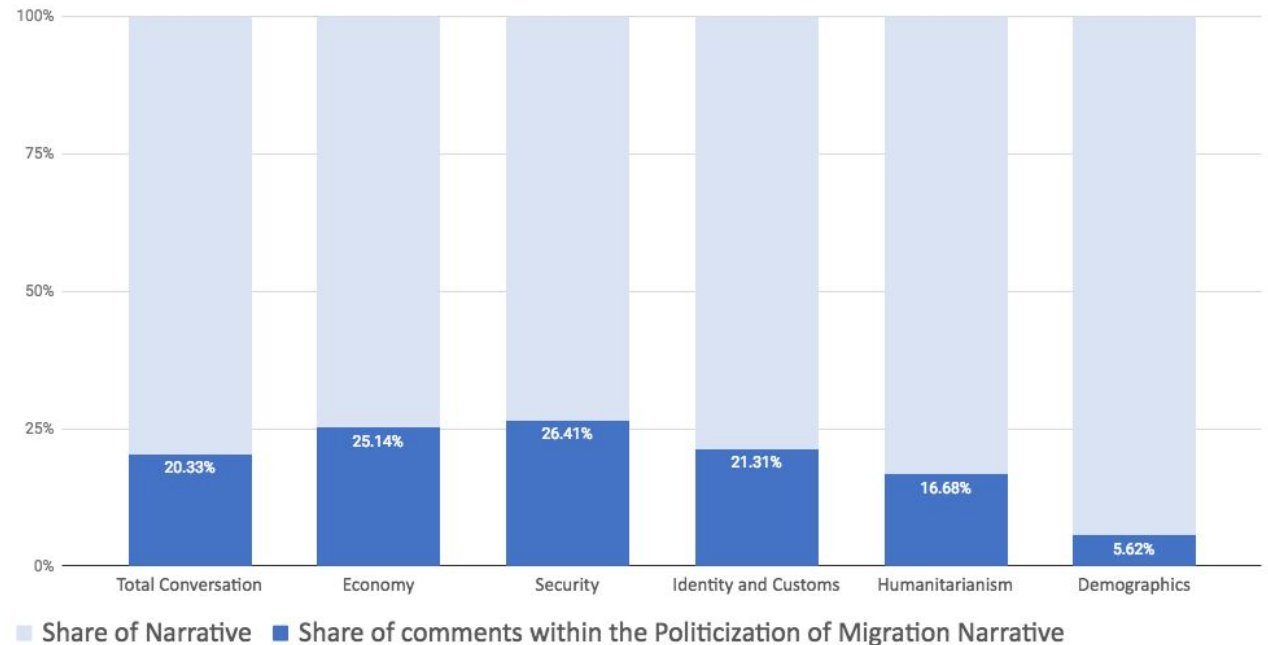
2.

Local Issues | FI

Welfare Nationalism

Finnish national identity is strongly entwined with the idea of the welfare state. This was illustrated in 2015 when anxiety over an influx of migrants was followed by calls of Finnish politicians to exclude migrants from receiving benefits. Often, exclusion from welfare provisions were based on ethno-nationalistic, othering and often racialising criteria. Consequently, welfare state ideologies and equal treatment were in tension with demands to differentiate between those who are perceived to belong to the nation.

It is very important to not allow foreigners to make our economy wild and irregular. Not only is it in accordance with what is right for the economy, but if we allow this influence to grow, Finnish working morals, ethics, and conduct will erode. We have high standards with ethics, we always pay our taxes, we provide for the services we receive...after all, been born in the course of hundreds of years. This kind of moral ethics can also weaken relatively quickly if space is given.



+ *Migration in the Context of European and Domestic Politics*

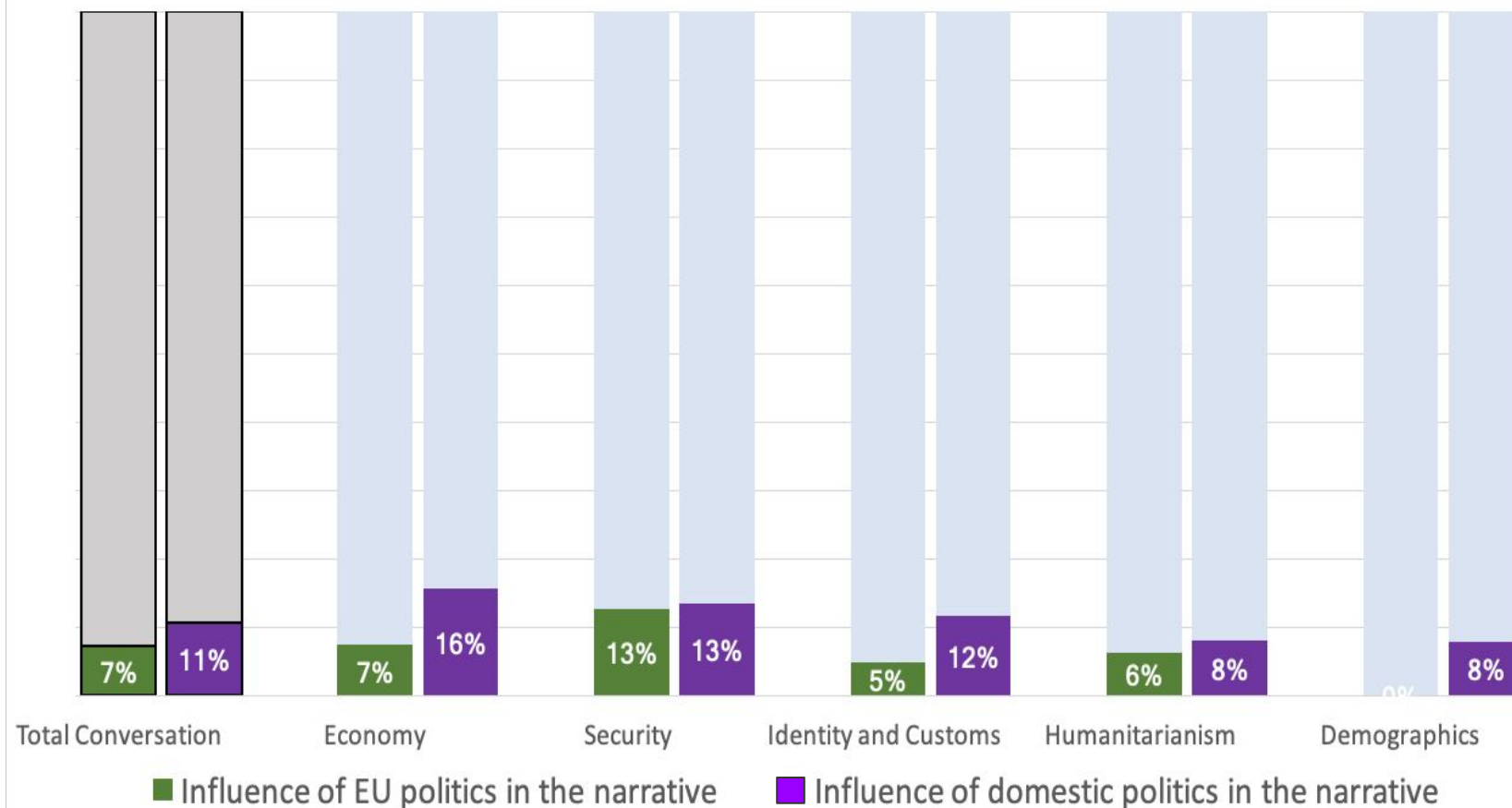


3.

European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | FI

Migration Discussed as a Domestic Issue

Migration is predominantly seen as a local issue. This is, in large part, due to Finns' historical emphasis on crafting policies tailored specifically to the populations own values and needs.



+ *Discussion Tone in Finland*



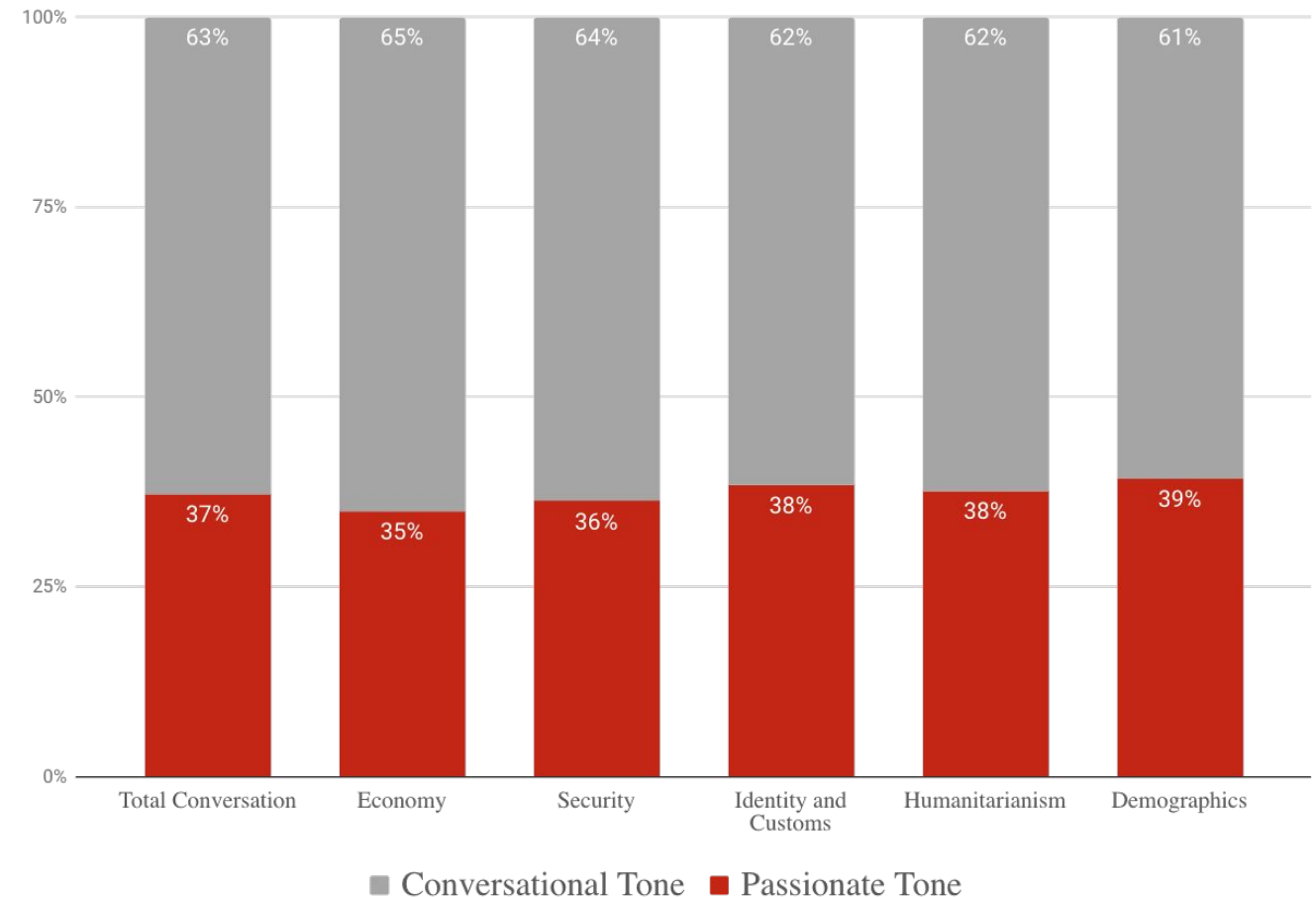
4.

Neutral Tone Throughout the Discussion

The Finnish migration conversation is characterized by a **neutral tone**, throughout all of the narratives. The **most passionate discussions** tend to occur within the **demographic** and **identity and customs narratives**.

The overall tone of the conversation in large part reflects Finnish political culture, which is often portrayed as being objective and dispassionate, with its politicians emphasising the importance of negotiation, compromise, and consensus. Such a political model has been regarded as central factor in the creation of the Finnish welfare state.

However, due to the rise in anti-immigration bloc, namely the Finns Party, political discourse has become more heated over issues discussing national identity and demographics.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.

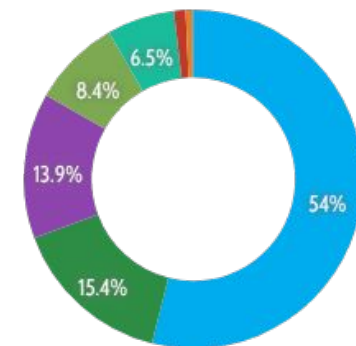
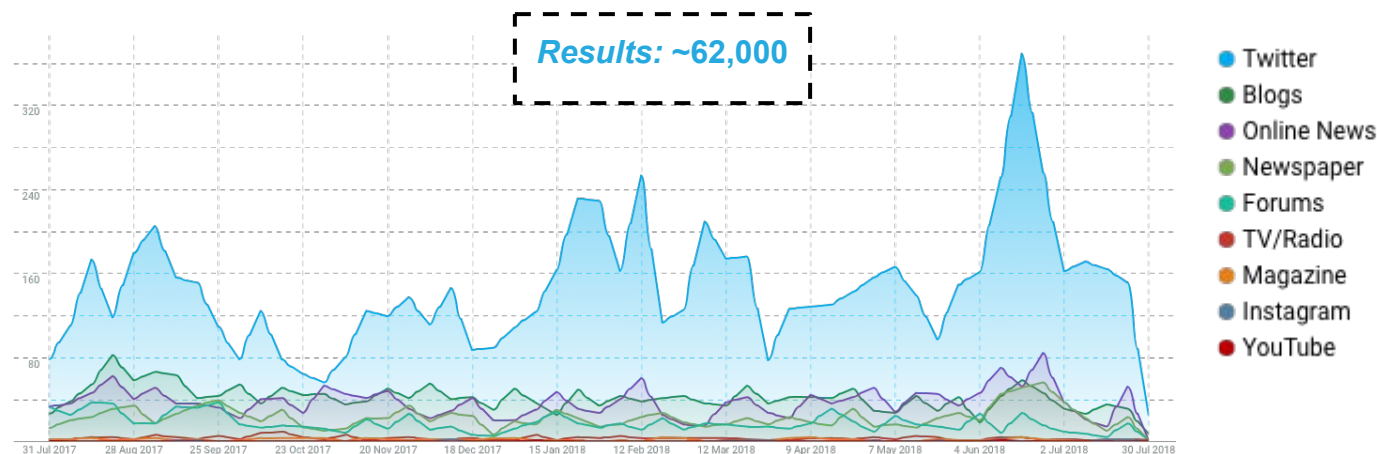


Channel Distribution | FI

Twitter Generates Content, Newspapers Inspire Engagement

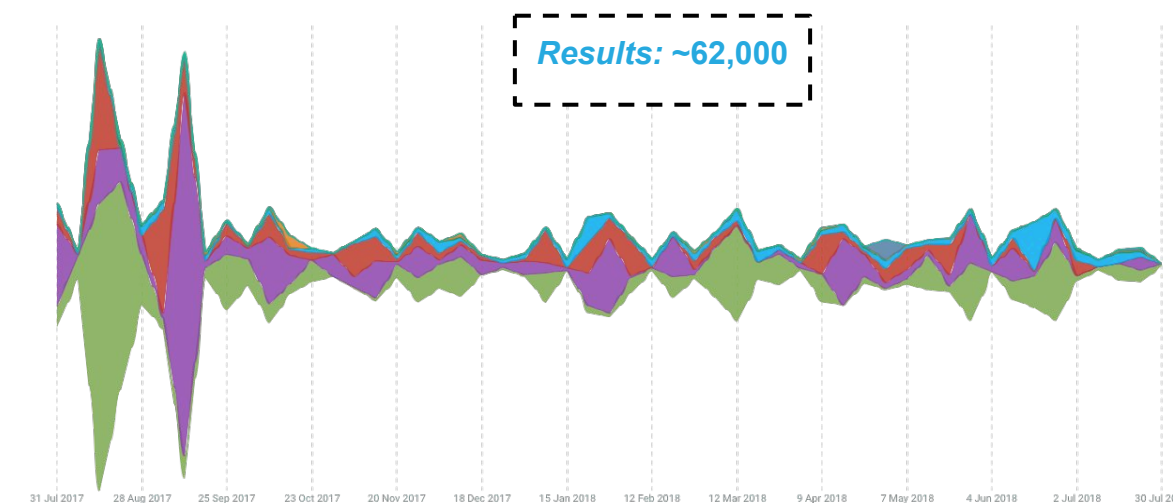
Content Generation:

Twitter is the main avenue used to discuss migration in Finland, followed by blogs and online news outlets. This media usage reflects a high level of engagement amongst Finnish citizens.



Content Engagement:

While newspapers only generate 8.4% of the content on migration, it's content sparks the highest level of engagement out of all media platforms. Online news content also sparked user engagement.



Newspaper
Engagement:

89.8K

Online News
Engagement:

78.3K



Most Influential Authors | FI

Top Online News Sites Trigger Most Attention

Thanks to its emphasis on transparency and equal rights, Finland's press was rated the 3rd freest in the world in 2017.* As such, authors of reports published on online news sites provide for the majority of public social media conversations in Finland.

| Most Influential Authors in the Overall Conversation | Publication | Description |
|--|------------------|-------------|
| maksamme virheet | suomenuutiset.fi | Online News |
| Johanna Manu | yle.fi | TV/Radio |
| Noona Bäckgren HS | hs.fi | Newspaper |
| uusi suomi | uusisuomi.fi | Online News |
| Paula Tapiola | yle.fi | TV/Radio |
| Outi Salovaara | is.fi | Online News |
| Jari Alenius | is.fi | Online News |

*<https://rsf.org/en/finland>