

## **Issue-based Euroscepticism: public attitudes on EU freedom of Movement**

**Sofia Vasilopoulou and Liisa Talving<sup>1</sup>**

[sofia.vasilopoulou@york.ac.uk](mailto:sofia.vasilopoulou@york.ac.uk)

[liisa.talving@york.ac.uk](mailto:liisa.talving@york.ac.uk)

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### **Abstract**

One of the unintended effects of the financial crisis has been increased mobility across the EU. The crisis exposed issues related to the potentially uneven distributional consequences of citizen mobility and contributed to perceptions that EU migrants are likely to be dependent on the recipient country's welfare state and put pressure on public services. This article presents a first attempt at understanding cross-European attitudes towards EU freedom of movement. Using multilevel analysis of survey data from Eurobarometer (Spring 2016), we demonstrate that opinions on free movement are driven by utilitarian self-interest as well as cosmopolitan predispositions, with higher occupational skills and educational attainment fostering optimistic outlook on mobility rights. However, we argue that support for EU freedom of movement is structured differently from EU support more generally in that in the post-crisis era citizens tend to consider their country's macroeconomic situation. Free movement of persons benefits not only the winners of European integration but also citizens traditionally placed on the losing side, especially in countries that do not fare well economically.

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## Introduction

Mobility is one of the key principles of European integration. It relates to the four fundamental freedoms guaranteed by European Union (EU) law: the freedom of movement of labour, capital, goods and services. These underpin the EU's single market, but are also seen as complementary to the EU's political objectives. While the free movement of persons may have a strong symbolic value because it relates to EU citizenship rights, it also embodies a variety of challenges. There is a tension between the EU's objective to increase competitiveness and address unemployment on the one hand, and member states' ability to regulate their domestic welfare and labour market institutions on the other. The financial crisis and subsequent economic difficulties in many EU member states resulted in high intra-EU migration flows. Out-group migration increased significantly from countries with high levels of unemployment. The proportion of EU nationals living in an EU members state other than the one that they were born rose to about three per cent (European Commission 2014; Portes 2015).

Although intra-EU migration flows were already present following the EU's enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe in the 2000s, the crisis served to politicise the issue in the hearts and minds of Europeans. The crisis exposed issues related to the potentially uneven distributional consequences of citizen mobility and contributed to perceptions that EU migrants are likely to be dependent on the recipient country's welfare state and put pressure on public services. This has further fuelled Eurosceptic attitudes combined with anti-immigrant sentiment. For example, the consequences of EU freedom of movement were central to the UK's Brexit referendum. Intra-EU migration flows were especially politicised by the Vote Leave campaign, and immigration-related concerns were strong predictors of vote choice in the referendum (Hobolt 2016; Vasilopoulou 2016). Far from the UK being an exceptional case, resistance to EU freedom of movement has the potential to spread elsewhere in Europe. Following the Brexit vote, several far right issue entrepreneurs in countries such as France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Sweden also called for EU membership referendums. In the context of the crisis exposing limits in state resources and continuing slow growth across the EU, questions related to redistributive politics and pressures on the welfare state are likely to become further politicised, especially in richer EU member states.

Against this background, this paper is concerned with people's attitudes towards EU freedom of movement. Existing research has focused on citizens' EU preferences from the perspective of preferences for more or less integration (e.g. Gabel 1998; Gomez 2015), preferences for widening versus deepening (e.g. Hobolt 2014; Karp and Bowler 2006), EU membership (e.g. Kuhn 2011), trust in EU institutions (e.g. Armingeon and Ceka 2014), and attitudes towards European economic governance (Kuhn and Stoeckel 2014). No research has thus far examined Euroscepticism from the perspective of preferences for EU freedom of movement. This is an important gap because EU freedom of movement taps into both questions of EU polity and EU policy (e.g. Mair 2000). On the one hand, EU freedom of movement relates to conflict over EU policy, in particular access to European labour markets, employment and welfare. On the other hand, it is an issue that can stir up conflict over constitutive issues of the EU polity including EU membership, EU competencies, and the extent to which labour mobility should be one of the cornerstones of European integration.

This paper advances this field of research by explaining attitudes towards EU freedom of movement across the member states. Using multilevel analysis of survey data from Eurobarometer (Spring 2016), we demonstrate that opinions on free movement are driven by utilitarian self-interest as well as cosmopolitan predispositions, with higher occupational skills and educational attainment fostering optimistic outlook on mobility rights. However, we argue that support for EU freedom of movement is structured differently from EU support more generally in that in the post-crisis era citizens tend to consider their country's macroeconomic situation. Free movement of persons benefits not only the winners of European integration but also citizens traditionally placed on the losing side, especially in countries that do not fare well economically. Our findings have implications for the progress of European integration, especially at a time when the EU is in the process of deciding on a course of action about the future direction of European integration (European Commission 2017).

### **Public attitudes on free movement of persons**

The first step for explaining citizen preferences towards free movement of persons is to try to unpack the policy itself. This is a fundamental principle of cooperation within the EU framework, which relates to EU citizens' right to freely work and reside in another EU country and to enjoy equal treatment with nationals in access to employment, working conditions, and all other social and tax advantages. Free movement of persons is the cornerstone of EU citizenship, established by the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. EU citizenship is an automatic right conferred upon nationals of EU member states, which is practically activated through free movement. While EU freedom of movement promotes intra-EU migration, it should not be equated with immigration from outside the EU. The facilitation of shared experiences through the right of free movement has been thought to foster common European values and identity, and is a constitutive element of an EU polity-in-the-making. This may also be substantiated empirically in the Eurobarometer Spring 2016 data with the correlation between people's attitudes towards free movement of persons and attitudes towards immigration from outside the EU being very low ( $r=.13$ ) and even lower with perceptions that immigrants contribute to their country ( $r=.10$ ). This suggests that to understand attitudes towards EU freedom of movement, we need to go beyond explanations of anti-immigration sentiment and examine the potential effects that the process of intra-EU mobility may have on individuals.

In doing so, our first set of hypotheses relate to the economic component of EU freedom of movement. A country's macro-economic performance is likely to affect citizen attitudes. Citizens may judge and evaluate EU freedom of movement based on its expected implications for their national economy. Although intra-EU mobility is low compared to migration flows from outside the EU and tends to be low in comparison to the United States, we know that the EU crisis has marked a step-change in intra-EU mobility, and that intra-EU migration flows tend to primarily occur from poorer towards richer countries (Portes 2015). Citizens from EU member states with lower GDP levels are more likely to migrate for the pursuit of better opportunities and the prospect of a more affluent future. By contrast, emigration from more affluent EU member states tends to be much lower. This suggests that population change is more likely to have been felt in richer EU member states. In the context of an economic crisis that puts a strain on resources, population growth due to

intra-EU migration may result in a reaction against freedom of movement. In rich EU member states, this may stimulate discussions regarding redistributive politics, access to welfare provision and competition for the collective goods of the state with EU citizens who are nonetheless non-nationals. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1a: (country-level utilitarianism) Citizens in richer EU member states are less likely to be supportive of EU freedom of movement.

Perceptions on the impact of EU freedom of movement on redistributive politics may not however be uniform across the population. Freedom of movement has a strong utilitarian component related to the potential financial costs and benefits of employing EU workers in the domestic labour market and of granting EU citizens access to different national welfare systems. The question that arises is whether EU migrants contribute to the national economy more than what they take out. Related to this is competition with non-natives for jobs and welfare provision. On the one hand, there might be a perception that since EU migrants tend to come from poorer EU member states, they may become dependent on the welfare state and may compete for jobs with low-skilled workers from the recipient country. On the other hand, EU migrants may be seen as a way for domestic economies meeting labour demand and coping with spikes in unemployment. This distinction in citizens' perceptions may depend upon whether an individual may be thought to benefit or lose from the process of globalisation and European integration (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008; Hutter et al. 2016). EU freedom of movement has the potential to tap into a variety of crosscutting concerns especially at times of widespread insecurity and change as a result of the European crisis. Low-skilled individuals who are employed in more precarious positions and thus tend to be more dependent on state welfare might see EU freedom of movement as a threat to their status because it adds an extra layer of competition for resources. Highly skilled individuals who may benefit from international competition and flexible access to low cost employment may perceive EU freedom of movement as an opportunity. We thus hypothesise that:

H2: (individual-level utilitarianism) Low-skilled individuals (losers of globalisation) are less likely to be supportive of EU freedom of movement.

Beyond strict utilitarian considerations, attitudes towards free movement of persons across the EU may also have a strong cosmopolitan component. This is because EU citizenship is of an inherently cosmopolitan nature. EU citizens can simultaneously be citizens of the country they were born in and citizens of the European community. We define cosmopolitanism as 'the extent to which people have an interest in, and orientation towards, groups of individuals who are distant from them, geographically or culturally, as opposed to a local orientation that extends only to one's more immediate community' (Bechtel et al. 2014: 839). Here again there could be two contrasting viewpoints. While some may perceive that EU freedom of movement is an opportunity for cultural enrichment and thus support it, others may view the entry of EU migrants as changing the social fabric of their country and thus oppose it. We argue that where one would stand on this may depend on educational attainment. While education may enable citizens to benefit from economic opportunities, it also tends to cultivate openness, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, acceptance of other cultures, and empathy of different ways of life (e.g. Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006; Bornschieer and Kriesi 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Research has shown that education is a strong predictor of immigration attitudes, with more educated

individuals being significantly less racist and placing value on cultural diversity (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). In addition, we know that there is a widening educational gap in Eurosceptic attitudes since Maastricht (Hakhverdian et al. 2013: 53), and that individuals with low educational attainment tend to be more likely to exclusively identify with their national community (Polyakova and Fligstein 2016). We thus hypothesise that:

H3: (individual-level cosmopolitanism) Lower-educated individuals are less likely to be supportive of EU freedom of movement.

Our last set of hypotheses relates to the different structure of attitudes towards free movement of persons compared to EU integration as a whole. At the individual level, the ‘winner-loser structure’ has become even more complex as a result of the crisis because the winners and losers from cross-European fiscal transfers (Kuhn and Stoeckel 2014: 7) are no longer the same as those who benefited or lost from the process of economic liberalisation (Kriesi et al. 2008) that took place during the pre-crisis era. Literature suggests that those who benefit from the EU’s economic liberalisation, i.e. highly-educated and skilled individuals working in competitive sectors, are likely to support the project. However, freedom of movement does not entail the same cost-benefit structure compared to economic liberalisation. It is not a simple relationship between where an individual stands in the labour market and how she will view the EU. Free movement of persons benefits not only the winners of European integration but also citizens traditionally placed on the losing side, especially in countries that do not fare well economically. As we have argued above, highly-skilled and highly-educated individuals will support free movement of persons as a result of their utilitarian considerations and cosmopolitan predisposition. However, not all low-skilled and low-educated individuals will oppose freedom of movement. In the context of this fundamental freedom, losers should be defined not only with regard to their socioeconomic status but also by where they live. Whereas low-skilled and low-educated individuals may view freedom of movement as an opportunity to go abroad to a richer EU member state in order to pursue a more prosperous future, the same individuals living in richer EU member states are not faced with similar prospects of moving abroad. Since they already live in the most affluent EU countries, EU freedom of movement does not provide them with similar opportunities of moving abroad. The right to access resources, such as the labour market and the welfare state, by non-national EU citizens has the potential to become perceived as a zero-sum game. Therefore, such individuals are more likely to view intra-EU migration as threatening their job prospects and access to welfare state. In short, EU freedom of movement has the potential to benefit both winners and losers from globalisation, especially in poor economies. We thus hypothesise that:

H4a: Low-skilled and low-educated individuals living in poor EU member states are likely to support EU freedom of movement.

H4b: Low-skilled and low-educated individuals living in rich EU member states are likely to oppose EU freedom of movement.

H4c: Highly-skilled and highly-educated individuals are likely to support EU freedom of movement irrespective of country of residence.

## **Data and methods**

To assess the preferences of EU citizens for EU freedom of movement, we rely on individual-level data from the Eurobarometer 85.2 (European Commission and European Parliament 2016), a survey conducted in May 2016, which asks:

- What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it. “The free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU”.

The above question constitutes our dependent variable. This is the second Eurobarometer survey that has asked this question, with the first one being the autumn wave in 2015. Previous surveys have included questions on whether EU freedom of movement should be given a priority and what it might personally mean to the individual, but have not asked the respondent to explicitly express their support or opposition to freedom of movement within the EU.

Our analysis is based on a sample comprising 27,818 individuals from 28 EU member states. In all countries, approximately 1,000 randomly selected respondents were interviewed, except for Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta where about 500 respondents took part in the survey. Separate data were collected in Northern Ireland and the former East Germany, which for this analysis were combined with Great Britain and West Germany respectively.

As mentioned earlier, we expect citizens in richer EU member states to be less supportive of freedom of movement and residence for persons in the EU (H1). We measure countries’ macro-economic performance using national GDP per capita<sup>2</sup> in 2015, a year previous to the survey fieldwork. The data are obtained from the Eurostat database. For GDP, log-transformation is used in order to improve the normality of the distribution.

To test the individual-level utilitarian explanation according to which citizens that are economically worse-off are less in favour of free movement of citizens (H2) we rely on personal socio-economic status. Unfortunately, the Standard Eurobarometer questionnaires do not include data on respondent’s income. We therefore operationalize individual socioeconomic status using the occupational categories: managers; other white collars; self-employed; manual workers; house persons; unemployed (reference category); retired; and students.

Respondent’s level of education, necessary to test the hypothesis according to which lower-educated individuals should be less supportive of EU freedom of movement (H3), is measured using the question in the Eurobarometer survey asking, “How old were you when you stopped full-time education?”. The answers were given in full years and were recoded into categories ‘up to 15 years’ referring to low education, ‘16 to 19 years’ referring to medium education and ‘20 years or older’ referring to high

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<sup>2</sup> GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS). The volume index of GDP per capita in PPS is expressed in relation to the EU28 average set to equal 100. If the index of a country is higher than 100, this country’s level of GDP per capita is higher than the EU average and vice versa. Expressing figures in PPS eliminates the differences in price levels between countries and allows meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries. Source: Eurostat.

education. Respondents still studying were assigned to these categories according to their actual age.

Finally, we include interaction terms between national GDP and two individual-level variables, i.e. respondent occupational status and educational level, in order to test the expectation that opposition to EU freedom of movement is lower in richer EU member states among low-skilled and low-educated citizens and higher in poorer member states among similar individuals (H4a; H4b). We also expect to find that high-skilled and higher-educated citizens are in favour of mobility rights irrespective of country affluence (H4c).

The models include socio-demographic controls, e.g. age (in full years) and gender (1=male, 2=female). They also include an individual's self-placement on the left-right scale (1-10), as right-wing individuals are more likely to oppose outsiders. We also include a squared term of left-right ideology so as to account for the possibility that attitudes towards freedom of movement are more pessimistic among voters placed towards the extremes of the political spectrum, as often shown in studies on Euroscepticism (see e.g. Steenberger et al. 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers 2010; De Vries and Edwards 2009; van Elsas et al. 2016). Additionally, we control for European identity. We expect citizens with weak attachment to Europe to be less supportive of EU freedom of movement. EU opinion tends to be conditional upon the strength of national identity and the extent to which individuals feel European at heart. When national identity is conceived in exclusive terms, European integration may be viewed as threatening national identity, which leads to opposing the EU project (Carey 2002; McLaren 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2009). Attitudes towards free movement are likely to be shaped by a similar mechanism. To measure the level of European attachment, we utilize the following question: "Do you see yourself as nationality only, nationality and European, European and nationality or European only?". The responses were given on a scale from 1 to 4, where higher values indicate stronger feeling of European identity.

At the country-level, we include a dummy for Eurozone membership. We also include a continuous measure of levels of within-EU immigration in each country<sup>3</sup>, relying on previous evidence that attitudes towards immigration correlate negatively with the number of immigrants in a country due to heightened ethnic competition. To construct this variable, we used Eurostat data on the size of population born in another EU member state and calculated a percentage change from 2014 to 2015<sup>4</sup>. The value is positive if immigration from other EU member states to a country has increased and negative if it has decreased. The variable helps us to capture the immigration influx in the year previous to the Eurobarometer survey fieldwork<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ideally, we would use data at the regional level, but unfortunately data that enables to distinguish between immigration from the EU and non-EU countries is only available in Eurostat at the country level.

<sup>4</sup> Ideally, we would compare levels of immigration in 2015 to those in the pre-crisis time (e.g. 2007), but unfortunately data that enables to distinguish between immigration from the EU and non-EU countries is only available in Eurostat from 2014 onwards.

<sup>5</sup> The variable exhibits no strong positive correlation with GDP ( $r = -.14$ ), so muting concerns that richer countries systematically attract higher levels of within-EU immigration and that adding both variables in the models could cause multicollinearity.

To account for the hierarchical structure of the data, i.e. the possibility that attitudes towards the EU freedom of movement are correlated within countries, we employ multilevel regression analysis where respondents are nested in countries. This constitutes 27,818 units on level 1 and 28 units in level 2. In addition to data structure, we have a motivation to use multilevel modelling due to substantive interest in the effects of group-level predictors on individual-level outcomes, which requires us to model the variation on both levels (Snijders and Bosker 1999). We run binary response random intercept models, which include both individual- and country-level variables. For the purpose of better substantive interpretation, raw variables are used in the first stage of the analysis. In the second stage, independent variables are standardized in order to carry out a within-model comparison of different explanations.

## Results

A first look at the descriptive statistics reveals a great degree of variation across countries in the attitudes towards EU freedom of movement. Stronger opposition to free movement of EU citizens may be found in Western European countries. The countries with the highest opposition score include the UK with 34.4 per cent of British citizens being against freedom to work, study and travel freely across the EU, followed by Denmark at 30.9 per cent (see Figure 1). Austria, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands follow with 25.3, 23.9, 20.8 and 20.7 per cent respectively. This contrasts with Southern European countries such as Greece, Spain and Portugal, which score 16.4, 5.6 and 8.7 respectively. Attitudes also vary significantly among Central and Eastern European countries. Interestingly, we may observe relative opposition to EU freedom of movement in Poland (16.6 per cent), Romania (14.8 per cent) and Hungary (14.2 per cent). The Baltic countries, on the other hand, show the lowest opposition levels across the EU with 2.3 per cent in Latvia, 3 per cent in Lithuania and 4.6 per cent in Estonia. The intraclass correlation of 0.13 on the country-level in a null model (not shown) indicates a weak but still existing correlation of respondents within countries, supporting the choice of using the multilevel estimation approach.

[Figure 1 about here]

Next, we estimate a multilevel regression model to identify the effect of a set of selected explanatory variables on attitudes towards freedom of movement across the EU. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if the respondent is for freedom of movement (81.6 per cent of the total sample) and as 0 in case of being against it (13.4 per cent), while all respondents indicating 'don't know' have been omitted from the analysis (5 per cent). Table 1 shows the results of models with all theoretically driven predictors and control variables. Respondent occupational status and education are defined as categorical in order to be able to observe the effects for all response groups separately. The variance in random intercepts, not reported here, is significantly different from zero in both models, implying that citizens' attitudes towards freedom of movement differ significantly across countries. A likelihood-ratio test confirms that the random-intercept models offer significant improvement over a logistic regression model ( $p=.0000$ ).

Firstly, fixed effects of an additive model in the form of log odds are reported in Model 1 in Table 1 below. On the individual level, we find a significant difference in attitudes towards freedom of movement between occupational groups. Compared to



unemployed citizens, mostly students, but also managers, self-employed and retired people are significantly more in favour of free movement across the EU. Holding all other variables at their means, the predicted probability of being supportive of freedom of movement (not shown in the table) is 88 per cent for unemployed and white collars, 89 per cent for manual workers, 90 per cent for self-employed, retired, house persons and managers, and 93 per cent for students. These findings imply that citizens who are most likely to directly benefit from the possibilities to reside, study and work freely anywhere in the EU tend to express higher support for the policy. In other words, voters seem to base their opinion on free movement, at least partly, on individual cost-benefit analyses<sup>6</sup>.

The results also corroborate our expectation according to which citizens with lower educational attainment are less supportive of EU freedom of movement (H3). There is a statistically significant difference between educational groups in terms of attitudes towards free movement (see Model 1 in Table 1). The group whose attitudes significantly differ from the rest are the higher-educated individuals, i.e. people who finished full-time education at the age of 20 or later. The probability of endorsing freedom of movement (not shown) for people who fall into this category is 91 per cent. Two other groups, representing low and medium levels of education (years in education 15 or less or 16-19, respectively), are not significantly different from each other in terms of attitudes towards EU-wide mobility. In both groups, the likelihood of being in favour of freedom of movement remains slightly lower at 88-89 per cent. Thus, we may witness that it is only higher education that encourages optimistic views on freedom of movement.

Other individual-level factors shaping citizens' views on freedom of movement are EU attachment and political ideology, with levels of approval being higher among those expressing stronger attachment to Europe as well as those leaning left on the political spectrum (see Model 1 in Table 1). The relationship between left-right self-placement and attitudes towards freedom of movement is, however, curvilinear. Support levels remain evenly high for respondents with the ideological leaning between 1 and 5 on a 10-point scale, but start dropping when the ideology score reaches 6 or above (not shown). Individuals' age and gender do not play a significant role in framing public attitudes towards free movement of citizens within the EU.

[Table 1 about here]

Turning to country-level variables, we are interested in differences in the attitudes towards EU freedom of movement depending on distribution of wealth across EU member states (H1). The effect of national GDP per capita appears significant in the model with a negative sign, indicating that – as hypothesized – citizens in wealthier countries are more opposed to free movement than their counterparts in poorer EU

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<sup>6</sup> The results remain similar when socioeconomic status is measured via self-assigned social class or subjective evaluation to household financial situation. Compared to the working class, people who place themselves in upper middle class are significantly more supportive of EU freedom of movement (predicted probabilities 89 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively). And compared to respondents who consider their financial situation very poor, those who see their situation as rather poor, rather good or very good are significantly more likely to support EU-wide mobility (predicted probabilities 81 per cent, 87 per cent, 91 per cent and 91 per cent, respectively).

member states (see Model 1 in Table 1). Average marginal effects (not shown) demonstrate that one-unit change in the logged GDP variable decreases the probability of supporting freedom of movement by 14%. Translated into predicted probabilities (not shown), the likelihood of approval of free movement is, for instance, 95 per cent for the poorest country in the EU, Bulgaria, 88 per cent for the median country, Malta, and 64 per cent for the wealthiest one, Luxembourg<sup>7</sup>. In addition, living in a Eurozone member country increases individuals' likelihood of supporting free movement of citizens. Interestingly, actual levels of immigration from other EU countries in the year previous to survey fieldwork exhibit no significant impact on attitudes towards mobility rights.

To summarize the results of the additive regression model, we next assess the relative explanatory weight of different predictors on the dependent variable. To do so, we standardize all independent variables using z-standardization. Converting variables to z-scores instead of using the original units of measurement enables us to determine where each value is situated compared to the sample mean and allows for the effect sizes within models to be more easily compared. The results are visualized on Figure 2. For the sake of better interpretation, the results are presented as average marginal effects. The plot outlines the results described above: variables that are statistically significantly associated with attitudes towards freedom of movement are respondent's occupational status and educational level, ideological leaning (squared term), EU attachment, country's macroeconomic performance and the Eurozone membership status. Furthermore, the comparison of standardized variables enables us to see that the two most prominent predictors are respondent's attachment to the EU, which shows a positive correlation with attitudes towards free movement, and national GDP, which has a negative effect on the outcome variable. One standard deviation change in EU attachment increases the probability of endorsing freedom of movement by 57 percentage points and one standard deviation change in the logged GDP variable decreases the likelihood by 45 percentage points. Occupation, education, political ideology and country's Eurozone membership shape the attitudes to a smaller extent. Thus, support for freedom to move and reside freely within the EU is the highest among individuals who feel strong identification with the union as well as those who live in poorer member states. Conversely, the strongest opposition to freedom of movement may be found among people with profound national attachment and in European countries that are economically better off.

[Figure 2 about here]

Thus far, our results suggest that, on average, the typical winners hold more optimistic attitudes towards mobility rights than citizens who have benefited less from European integration. However, it is plausible to expect that the magnitude of individual-level effects is determined by broader contextual factors. As argued earlier, we consider the possibility that effects of occupational skills and educational attainment on opinions on free movement perform differently depending on the macroeconomic circumstances that the individual is exposed to. More specifically, we hypothesized that opposition to EU freedom of movement is more pronounced among low-skilled and low-educated individuals living in wealthier countries. To test this indirect effect of national economy, we introduce interaction terms between GDP per

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<sup>7</sup> All results hold when we repeat the analyses without Luxembourg, which could be considered an outlier due to its very high GDP per capita.

capita and two individual-level variables, respondents' occupational status and educational level. The results are shown in Models 2 and 3 in Table 1, but as regression coefficients only reflect results in relation to reference groups ('unemployed' and 'education<15 years', respectively), the outcome is better illustrated graphically on Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3 firstly tells us that, overall, support for free movement of persons is lower in wealthier countries. The effect is not entirely linear, with support levels remaining relatively high in countries in low and middle economic groups, but dropping notably in member states with high GDP per capita. Furthermore, we may witness that in countries with low or middle levels of wealth the attitudes towards movement rights are not defined by respondent socioeconomic status. In these member states, support for EU freedom of movement is homogeneously high independent of people's social standing, even among groups that are typically considered the most Eurosceptical, such as blue-collar workers and unemployed (see e.g. Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). In richer countries, in turn, opinions are conditioned by individual material well-being. Comparing different occupational groups, the decrease is the steepest for manual workers (marked with a dashed line on Figure 3). Relative to their counterparts in poorer member states, people with lower skills in affluent countries are considerably more sceptical towards the right to move and reside freely in the EU. For example, predicted probability of favouring free movement is 55 per cent for a manual worker in the richest EU country, Luxembourg, but nearly twice as high at 96 per cent for a manual worker in the poorest country in our sample, Bulgaria. For a blue-collar worker in the country with the median GDP value, Malta, the likelihood of endorsing freedom of movement is 88 per cent<sup>8</sup>.

[Figure 3 about here]

Similar patterns emerge when we look at the interaction effects between GDP per capita and respondent's education. Educational attainment fails to explain preferences for freedom of movement in countries that do not fare well economically, but diversifies the attitudes in richer countries (see Figure 4). Interestingly, the group that expresses the strongest opposition to mobility rights in wealthy member states are not the citizens with the lowest educational level (marked with a dashed line on Figure 4), but instead those belonging to the middle category, although the differences between the two groups are small. However, the contrast between similar educational categories across countries is noteworthy. For example, predicted probability of favouring EU freedom of movement is 94 per cent for a person with the middle level of education in the poorest member state, but 87 per cent for a person with a similar profile in the median country and only 62 per cent in the country with the EU-wide maximum GDP per capita. Taken together, the results from the interaction models demonstrate that if we ignore the contextual conditionality, we miss important

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<sup>8</sup> The differences are similar when individuals' socioeconomic status is measured via self-assigned social class or subjective evaluation to household financial situation (not shown). For example, predicted probability of being in favour of EU freedom of movement is 96 per cent for a member of the working class in the poorest country, 88 per cent in the median country and 54 per cent in the richest country in the EU. In a similar manner, for a person that considers their household financial situation very poor, predicted probability of supporting free movement is 91 per cent in the poorest country, 80 per cent in the median country and 45 per cent in the richest country in the EU.

empirical insights into how the structure of global winners and losers varies in post-crisis Europe.

[Figure 4 about here]

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to explain public opinion on free movement of persons across the EU. As we hypothesised, on the individual level rational cost-benefit considerations and cosmopolitanism play a significant role. Citizens with higher occupational skills and educational attainment are more supportive of EU freedom of movement. These results hold controlling for feelings of European identity, which is a strong driver of EU attitudes. On the macro level, country affluence is a significant predictor of opinions on EU freedom of movement. Citizens in richer countries that receive more EU migrants seem to be more prone to perceiving EU freedom of movement as a threat to their national resources. In addition to the direct impact, country economic performance also plays an important role in mitigating the individual-level effects. In poorer member states rational and cosmopolitan considerations have a weaker effect on attitudes towards EU freedom of movement. Support is evenly high among different groups of people, even those who are traditionally very Eurosceptic. In wealthier countries, however, the attitudes depend on individual's social standing. In those member states, people who are more vulnerable to redistribution of resources are significantly more opposed to freedom of movement than their peers in countries that are economically worse off.

Our findings have implications with regard to the politicization of the EU in richer Western countries. Although referendums similar to Brexit may not be very likely at this point, they are certainly possible. Our results show that far right EU issue entrepreneurs in these countries have a ready reservoir of negative opinion on EU freedom of movement to draw upon if a referendum opportunity arose. More broadly, this analysis contributes to a better understanding of the changing structures of EU politicisation by showing that there are different constellations of winners and losers depending on EU policy. Our findings point to the importance of examining public preferences not only on the general direction of European integration, but also explaining public opinion on specific EU-related issues that are likely to create different patterns of support and opposition.

Future research should look at more dimensions of Euroscepticism beyond EU freedom of movement, such as attitudes towards fiscal solidarity across the EU. Future research should also distinguish whether the structure of attitudes differs depending on the country of origin of EU migrants, e.g. are preferences for intra-EU migration from Western Europe different to those from Central and Eastern Europe? In addition, how do attitudes towards intra-EU migration compare to attitudes towards a country 'exporting' its own EU nationals to another EU member state? Overall, our research takes into account preferences towards specific EU-related issues, and promises to improve our understanding of Euroscepticism across the EU.

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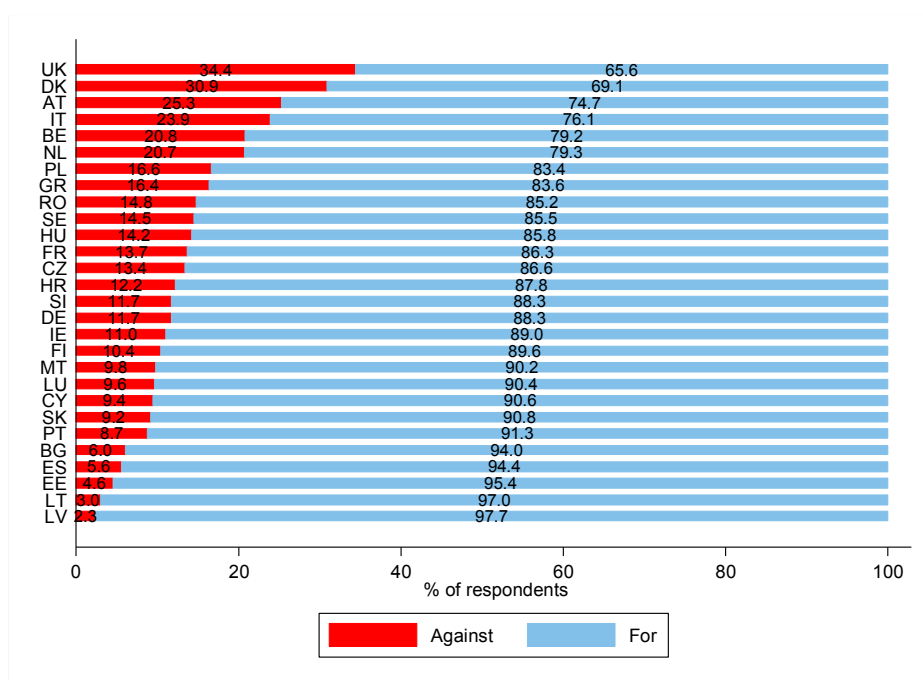
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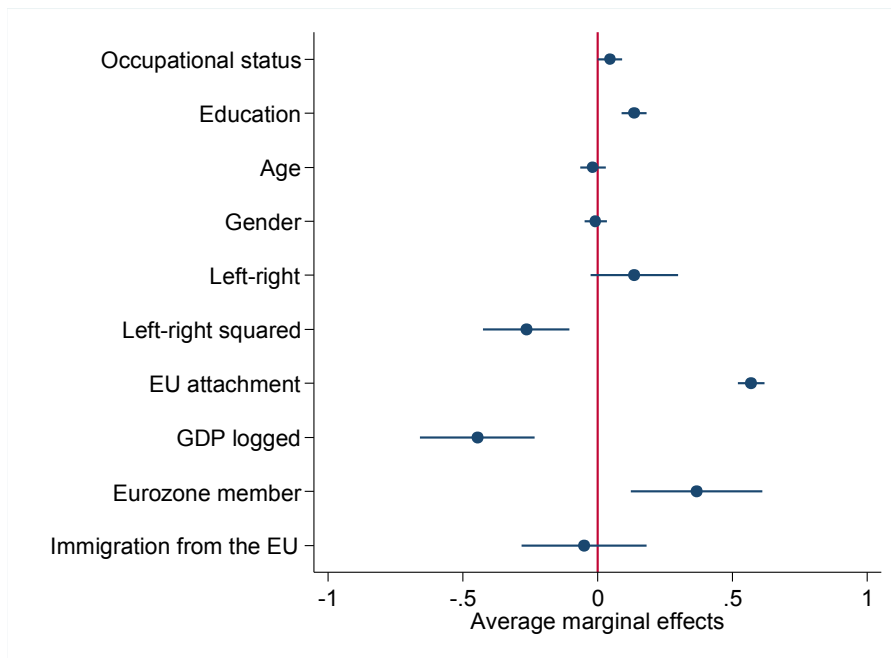
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List of figures and tables



**Figure 1.** Support and opposition to EU freedom of movement by country  
*Source:* Eurobarometer 85.2 (2016)

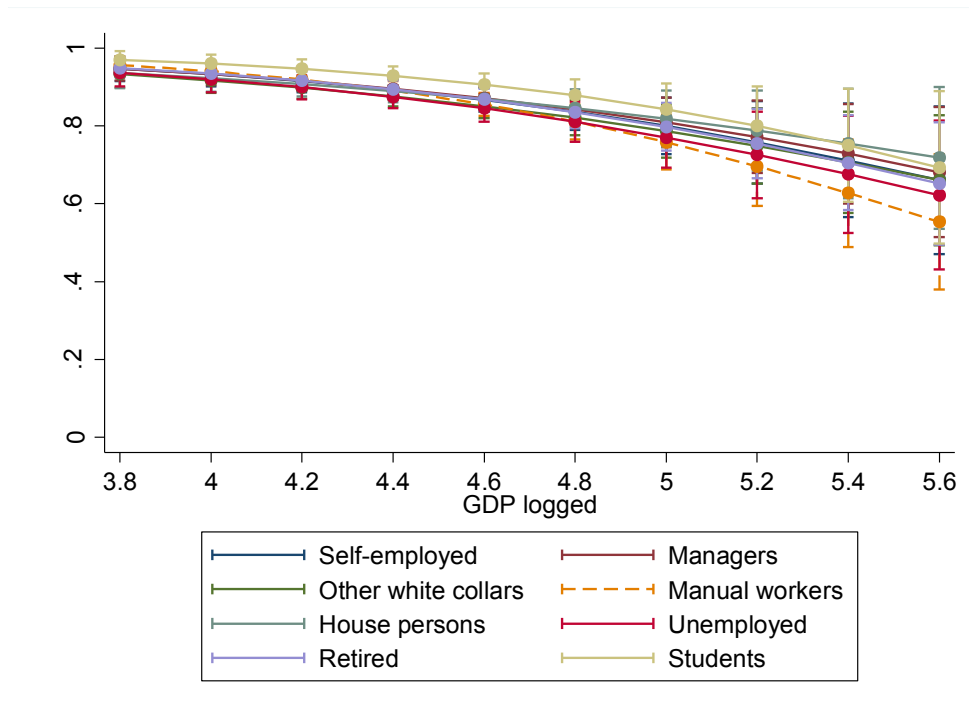




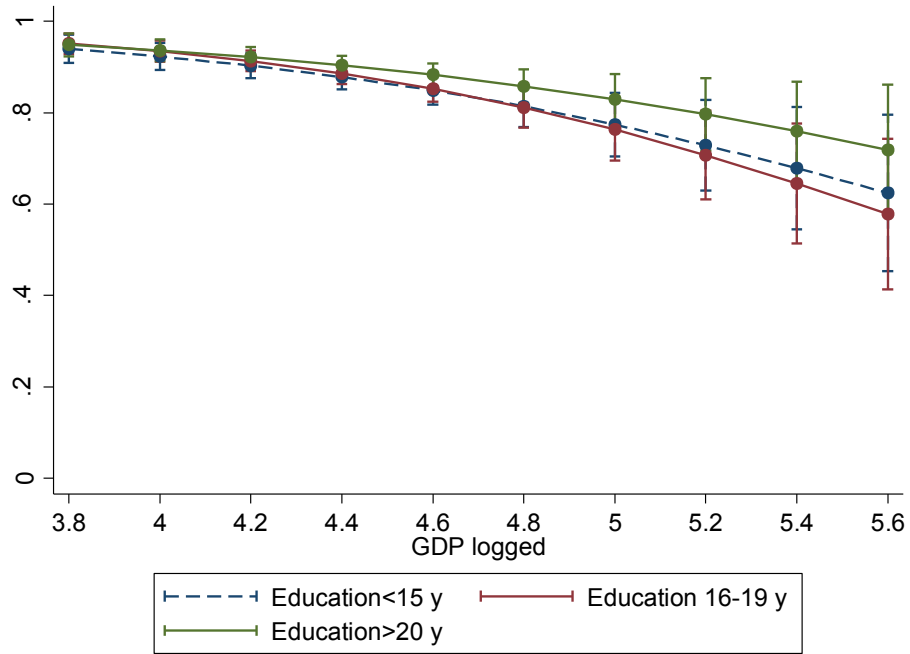
**Figure 2.** Determinants of support for EU freedom of movement

*Source:* Eurobarometer 85.2 (2016)

*Notes:* Average marginal effects from multilevel logistic regression model with 95% confidence intervals. All variables are standardized using z-scores.



**Figure 3.** Support for EU freedom of movement by occupational status and GDP  
*Source:* Eurobarometer 85.2 (2016)  
*Notes:* Predicted probabilities from multilevel logistic regression model with 95% confidence intervals.



**Figure 4.** Support to EU freedom of movement by educational level and GDP  
*Source:* Eurobarometer 85.2 (2016)  
*Notes:* Predicted probabilities from multilevel logistic regression model with 95% confidence intervals.

**Table 1.** Determinants of attitudes towards EU freedom of movement (fixed effects)

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Constant		6.24*** (1.49)	5.90** (1.84)	5.93*** (1.66)	
Individual-level variables	Self-employed	0.20* (0.11)	0.22 (1.70)	0.20* (0.11)	
	Managers	0.25** (0.10)	-0.02 (1.54)	0.26** (0.10)	
	Other white collars	0.05 (0.10)	-0.61 (1.41)	0.05 (0.10)	
	Manual workers	0.10 (0.09)	1.97 (1.32)	0.10 (0.09)	
	House persons	0.20 (0.13)	-1.05 (1.78)	0.20 (0.13)	
	Retired	0.20** (0.10)	0.45 (1.26)	0.21** (0.10)	
	Students	0.62*** (0.14)	1.81 (2.02)	0.64*** (0.14)	
	Education 16-20 y	0.04 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	1.16 (0.92)	
	Education >20 y	0.32*** (0.07)	0.32*** (0.07)	-0.45 (1.00)	
	Age	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	
	Gender	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	
	Left-right ideology	0.06* (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.06* (0.04)	
	Left-right ideology <sup>2</sup>	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	
	EU attachment	0.87*** (0.04)	0.87*** (0.04)	0.87*** (0.04)	
	Country-level variables	GDP logged	-1.40*** (0.33)	-1.32*** (0.41)	-1.33*** (0.37)
		Eurozone member	0.76*** (0.26)	0.77*** (0.26)	0.78*** (0.26)
		Immigration from the EU	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Cross-level interactions	Self-employed # GDP logged	-	-0.01 (0.37)	-	
	Managers # GDP logged	-	0.06 (0.34)	-	
	Other white collars # GDP logged	-	0.14	-	

		(0.31)	
Manual workers # GDP logged	-	-0.41	-
		(0.29)	
House persons # GDP logged	-	0.27	-
		(0.39)	
Retired # GDP logged	-	-0.06	-
		(0.28)	
Students # GDP logged	-	-0.26	-
		(0.44)	
Education 16-20 y # GDP logged	-	-	-0.25
			(0.20)
Education >20 y # GDP logged	-	-	0.17
			(0.22)
Observations	20,852	20,852	20,852
Number of groups	28	28	28
Log Likelihood	-7513	-7509	-7510

*Source:* Eurobarometer 85.2 (2016)

*Notes:* Multilevel logistic regression model. Entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: unemployed; education<15 y.

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10