Written evidence submitted by Professor Nick Vaughan-Williams and Dr Georg Löfflmann, University of Warwick – written evidence (CCE0083)

1. The evidence presented here is informed by an on-going programme of academic research funded by The Leverhulme Trust (PLP-2015-081) entitled ‘Everyday Narratives of European Border Security and Insecurity’. The research involves in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 focus groups lasting for 90 minutes each and involving more than 150 EU citizens across 9 cities in the UK, Germany, Hungary and Greece: Miskolc (Hungary), Munich (Germany), Nottingham, and Thessaloniki (Greece) in phase one (November to December 2016); and Berlin, Budapest, Cologne, Coventry, and London in phase two (September 2017).

2. The aims of this research project are to investigate notions of citizenship in the context of everyday experiences of the on-going ‘migration crisis’ in Europe with an emphasis on:
   a. how citizens see their own identity and those of their families, communities, and nations in the context of migration into Europe;
   b. issues of societal integration, safety, and security, and the perceived threats and benefits of migration; and
   c. questions of citizens’ awareness of and support for governments’ efforts to enhance border security.

3. The evidence provided here presents our findings in respect of the UK case, which shows that notions of citizenship and belonging in the twenty-first century are threatened by an information gap about who migrants are, where they have come from, their economic and cultural impact, and what their intentions might be; this gap is then filled with sensationalist media coverage, speculation and rumour at the level of the everyday, and this results in the emergence of cultures of hostility and suspicion.

4. While hostile, xenophobic, and sometimes racist narratives are commonplace among ‘everyday’ views on migration in European countries – including the UK – so too are volunteer and welcoming initiatives, calls for governments to do more to protect migrants and refugees, and other expressions of popular support for migrants that are otherwise denied proper representation in dominant accounts. Our research findings reveal not only a varied and heterogeneous picture, but also a common set of demands among UK citizens for access to better sources of information, less sensationalism, greater contextualisation, and higher quality public debate.

5. UK citizens interviewed for our project have articulated a clear need for access to authoritative, unbiased information about what the needs of migrants are, how they can be better supported from an integration perspective, and what they need from citizens in order to thrive in common. Supporting integration and countering suspicion and prejudice in society requires local communities and government to enhance efforts to educate publics in the UK about the costs and benefits of migration, the local and national impact of migrants, and to facilitate an open exchange of information with citizens in the UK.

6. In the UK, net long-term international migration was estimated to be +246,000 in the year ending (YE) in March 2017, down 81,000 from +327,000 in YE March 2016 (Office for National Statistics, 2017). Existing public opinion poll data on popular attitudes towards immigration suggest that European citizens’ views have hardened since the start of the ‘migration crisis’ in 2015, with mass displacements of people on a scale not seen in Europe.
since the end of World War II. A Eurobarometer survey in 2015 found that 25 EU Member States, including the UK, had **majority negative attitudes on migration** and 90% of all respondents said that tougher border security was required (Eurobarometer 2015). In 2016, the largest number of applications for asylum (30,603 in total) in the UK came from nationals of Iran (4,192), followed by Pakistan (2,857), Iraq (2,666), Afghanistan (2,341), Bangladesh (1,939), Albania (1,488), and India (1,488) (Office for National Statistics, 2017).

In the face of terror attacks across Europe, a Pew research poll in 2016 found that more than 50% of citizens in 8 out of 10 EU counties – including the UK – believed that incoming refugees increased the likelihood of terrorism.

7. Our in-depth qualitative research paints a more complicated picture, which **challenges the idea that EU citizens in general and UK citizens in particular are straightforwardly hostile to migrant and refugee communities and automatically link immigration and (in)security**. Citizens’ concerns and the demands that they make of the media, government, and academia are far more nuanced than existing public opinion polls suggest; these methodologies do not offer detailed insights into why people have certain views on particular issues.

8. In contrast with public opinion data found in the Eurobarometer and Pew surveys, none of our participants called for outright tougher border security either in the European or UK contexts. While UK citizens in particular rejected the notion of complete freedom of movement and agreed that the state had a right to control its borders, this was accompanied by an equally strong rejection of the use of force to defend borders and their militarisation as a political response to the issue of migration into Europe. On the whole, we **found no evidence that UK citizens felt that their personal safety and security are threatened directly by migration**.

9. When we asked participants in Nottingham what they generally thought about migration and security, **no participant made spontaneous claims about the link between irregular migration and international terrorism**. More common were concerns about having to compete with migrants for access to housing, welfare, jobs, and social services, and thus issues of economic and societal security (Buzan et al 1998). The **impact of immigration on cultural identity and economic security in Britain was overall of far greater concern to citizens than issues of national security or fears about public safety**, which are often portrayed in tabloid media in a sensationalist fashion (Daily Express 2016).

10. In the UK context specifically there was also a prevailing sense that identity, social cohesion and neighbourliness had been challenged by the pace of economic and social change. Local communities with high immigration levels and relatively low average household incomes such as Boston (BBC 2016) feel alienated as a result of what they perceive to be a weakening of bonds between people at the level of the everyday. There were specific concerns about public spaces and the potential for anti-social behaviour such as drinking in public areas. The cultural Otherness of migrants was also debated in terms of linguistic difference, for example concerns about the ability of migrant children to follow classes in English and the potential impact on the quality of education provided in classes with high levels of migrant students.

11. However, rather than protesting the presence of migrants or their incompatibility with ‘British values’ per se, **concerns were expressed generally over the limited availability of**
public services for all citizens in the UK, in particular education and healthcare. As such fears about migration were exacerbated by existing conditions of fiscal austerity, which have negatively impacted public services.

12. Many, but not all, of the UK citizens we listened to spoke also of the **positive effects of migration and diversity for the UK economy, society, and culture**. Some participants questioned whether enough efforts were being made by central and local government to promote integration between citizens and newly-arrived refugees, particularly from Syria. Others also referred to what they perceived to be an ethical obligation to support migrant communities affected by UK foreign policy decisions such as support for the NATO-led military intervention in Libya.

13. Our evidence suggests that some UK citizens are confused about how people on the move should be categorised and that this confusion also impacts on notions of British identity and citizenship. Terms such as ‘refugee’, ‘asylum-seeker’, ‘economic migrant’, and ‘illegal migrant’ are often misunderstood and used interchangeably. The distinct issues of migration into the EU and migration within the EU are a source of particular misunderstanding. In turn many participants saw this as creating opportunities for the far-right and the cultivation of public atmospheres breeding hatred, xenophobia, and racism. **Conceptual confusion means that different legal categories are bundled together and thus there is an urgent need to enhance levels of education in schools about different types of migration, their histories, and the legal status of different kinds of people seeking entry to the UK as part of the citizenship curriculum.**

14. Confusion about the categorisation of migrants is further exacerbated by a lack of authoritative and objective information about migration into Europe and the UK. Citizens we listened to did not generally know where to turn to for accurate and unbiased data about the primary causes of population displacements, how much financial support migrants and refugee communities are given and by whom, and how much access to social welfare, housing, and jobs they are offered and on what basis. There is widespread criticism of the role of the media in sensationalising issues relating to migration and perceptions of ‘fake news’. **There is a risk that such an information deficit is then filled with misinformation and fuels cultures of envy, rivalry, and distrust, leading to a further erosion of social bonds and disintegration.**

15. Citizens we met welcomed the opportunity to air their views in the form of discussion groups (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2017a). They urged greater engagement and dialogue of this kind between government, citizens, and researchers. This challenges the notion that ours is an age marked by disengagement from politics and widespread disdain of expertise (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2017b). Rather, preliminary findings support the conclusion of previous studies (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams, 2016) that **participatory forms of research where citizens can engage and feel that their voices might be heard in the policy-making process could positively reinvigorate citizenship and modes of belonging in the UK.**

16. In conclusion, our research findings suggest that many UK citizens do not know where to access objective, authoritative information about migration, which has a diverse impact on contemporary notions of UK citizenship, identity, and belonging. This creates a knowledge gap, which is in turn filled with speculation, inaccuracy, or misinformation that can
contribute to everyday cultures of hostility and suspicion of migrant and refugee communities, which erodes social bonds. Our research suggests that the UK government should provide better and more accurate public information on migration, enhance integration between citizens and migrants in local communities, and strengthen efforts to counter anti-migration sentiment and prejudice via educational programmes; these measures would support stronger citizenship and civic engagement in the UK.

References


EU Commission, Standard Eurobarometer 84, Autumn 2015.


Office for National Statistics, Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: August 2017

G. Sheldrick, “Fresh terrorism fears sparked after plan to rehome 20,000 refugees in Britain,” Daily Express, 19 July 2016.


About the authors:


Dr Georg Löfflmann is Research and Teaching Fellow in International Security in the Department of Politics and International Studies (PAIS) at the University of Warwick. He is the author of American Grand Strategy under Obama (Edinburgh University Press, 2017) and has published in the journals, Geopolitics, Critical Studies on Security and Asian Security.

6 September 2017