

# 'Are they refugees or economic migrants?' The effect of asylum seekers' motivation to migrate on intentions to help them

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## Abstract

Immigration has played a significant role in human history as people move to new places for economic opportunities, religious freedom, and political refuge. However, asylum seekers are often viewed negatively and falsely portrayed in media, leading to fear and distrust among locals. In the current research, participants read a fictitious news article about an asylum seeker's (Syrian, Ukrainian, or Yemeni) motivation for seeking asylum (seeking safety, seeking financial betterment from a position of relative financial hardship, or seeking financial betterment from a position of extreme financial hardship). Participants then reported their willingness to help that asylum seeker, and their prejudice and empathy toward both that asylum seeker and their group as a whole (e.g., Syrian refugees). Results showed that people were more willing to help asylum seekers whose motivation for seeking asylum was grounded in safety concerns rather than moderate financial concerns (studies 1, 2, and 3). Participants also reported more willingness to help the asylum seeker's group as a whole if the individual asylum seeker's motivation was described as seeking safety rather than financial betterment. Further, describing financial concerns as so severe that they endangered survival generated more willingness to help than moderate financial concerns, demonstrating that severe enough financial concerns may be perceived as safety concerns (study 3). We also found that people were more willing to help Ukrainian refugees than Syrian refugees. Altogether, these findings have both theoretical and practical implications.

Over the past 10 years, the number of people forced to leave their homes has risen each year and is currently at its highest point in recorded history (UNHCR, 2022c). Around 89 million people were forcefully displaced worldwide by the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2022b). Together with the millions of people forced to flee Ukraine in 2022, the total number of forcibly displaced people now exceeds 100 million (UNHCR, 2022a). Moreover, it is anticipated that as the global climate crisis worsens, more people will be compelled to flee their homes seeking safety from disasters such as wildfires, tsunamis, and

droughts (World Vision, 2021). The rising number of forced migrants from the Middle East, Western and South Asia, Africa, and the Western Balkans to other lands defines the phenomenon known as "the refugee crisis," which started in 2015 (Duarte et al., 2016; World Vision, 2021). Governmental institutions all around the world have to deal with the erratic patterns of forced migration brought on by consistent yet unpredictable precursors to displacement (such as war, famine, and persecution; Anderson, 2018). The current research seeks to test the effects that assumptions about why people migrate

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have on attitudes towards those asylum seekers and refugees, specifically their willingness to help and welcome them.

A refugee is a person who has fled their country because of a severe threat of violence, persecution, or war (Kang, 2021; World Vision, 2021). An asylum seeker is a displaced individual who has not received official recognition as a refugee (World Vision, 2021). An economic migrant, on the other hand, is someone who is looking for better wages or living conditions (Kang, 2021). It is not easy, however, to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants, as both refugees and economic migrants may risk their lives to leave their country, and, given that many areas devastated by violence are also economically devastated, a person may fall into both categories (Kang, 2021). KhosraviNik (2009) investigated the discursive strategies used by British newspapers between 1996 and 2006 in how they represent refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. The article reveals that, despite differences in political viewpoint, all newspapers tend to construct similar social representations of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. Newspapers' framing strategies are crucial as they influence lay people's social representations of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Some studies have found that public perceptions of asylum seekers are more similar to how they are portrayed in the media than to how they are officially expressed (Pearce & Stockdale, 2009). For the purpose of this article, we will use the word "refugee" to refer to both asylum seekers and refugees, as both can be seen as belonging to a more extensive category of forcibly displaced people. A similar type of use was also made by Cowling et al. (2019).

Many nations perceive immigration negatively, and in the last few years, the number of political groups that promote xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and racist views has increased (De Coninck et al., 2021). Individuals in destination countries range in terms of their views on hosting refugees: on the one side, there is opposition to refugees, including a rise in the popularity of right-wing political parties. Unfavorable representations of refugees in some media and the widespread belief that refugees pose a threat to the host society maintain the rise of right-wing ideology and opposition to refugees (Esses et al., 2017). On the other side, there are campaigns like "Refugees Welcome" that advocate for openness towards refugees (Böhm et al., 2018).

## 1 | LAY BELIEFS ABOUT THE REASONS PEOPLE SEEK ASYLUM

The belief that many refugees are motivated by financial gain rather than concerns about their own safety is widespread. Newcomers are consequently sometimes seen as "so-called refugees," "bogus refugees," "fortune seekers," and "infiltrators" rather than "real" refugees (Esses et al., 2017; Neumayer, 2005; Onraet et al., 2021). For instance, in one survey conducted in Australia, 56.8% of those surveyed believed that asylum seekers come to Australia for a better life, and only 24.4% believed they are fleeing persecution (Mckay et al., 2012; see also Kang, 2021). In reality, of course, many asylum

seekers are genuinely escaping persecution, conflicts, violence, or threats of violence (Conte & Migali, 2019; Hatton, 2009; Robinson & Segrott, 2002). When political push forces (undesirable factors that lead a desire to migrate a new place) are too powerful, economic pull factors (favorable aspects that attract individuals to migrate a place) are not a solid explanation for the choice to migrate (Kang, 2021).

Although countries with high per capita GDP receive more asylum applications, people seek asylum often because of political push factors rather than pull factors (Kang, 2021). Furthermore, asylum seekers value liberal refugee recognition and family reunification policies more than the degree of social assistance for refugees and the ease of obtaining permanent residence status (Diop-Christensen & Diop, 2022). Most refugees seek asylum in neighbouring countries to their home instead of in more developed countries (Matsui & Raymer, 2020). For example, many more refugees settle outside of Europe than within Europe: Turkey houses more Syrian refugees than all of Europe combined, and Lebanon has a ratio of up to one refugee for every five citizens (Duarte et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the assumption that Europe is every refugee's destination is invalid (Rottmann & Kaya, 2021). A total of 58.6% of the Syrians interviewed in Turkey have no plans to settle in a country other than Turkey or Syria (Erdoğan, 2019). Only 1.6% of the refugees interviewed said they were thinking of leaving Istanbul and reaching a European Union country (Kaya, 2017). In addition, Syrians in Istanbul have not expressed a desire to move to Europe due to the strong social networks and close cultural ties established in Turkey over time (Rottmann & Kaya, 2021).

Overall, members of recipient societies clearly have lay theories about the motivations that drive asylum seekers to migrate, and those lay theories might not always accurately reflect refugees' real motivations. A systematic exploration of how attributed motivations of asylum seekers affect reactions to asylum seekers remains outstanding to date, and this is a knowledge gap we sought to address in the current work.

## 2 | ASYLUM SEEKING MOTIVATIONS AND RESULTING ATTITUDES

Previous research about refugees and asylum seekers primarily focused on survey research (Bansak et al., 2016; De Coninck et al., 2021; Genkova & Groesdonk, 2022), and there is not much experimental research. Also, the literature on how people react to asylum seekers' motivation for trying to settle in a new country is scarce. One recent study conducted in the Netherlands is an exception. Onraet et al. (2021) examined Dutch respondents' welcoming attitudes towards asylum seekers fleeing war, violence, and economic asylum seekers. They found people were more likely to accept asylum seekers escaping from war, and violence in their home countries than those who sought asylum to improve the economic future of their families.

Another study examined how different concerns about seeking asylum affect Europeans' attitudes (Bansak et al., 2016). In this study,

people read profiles of potential applicants for asylum in Europe and were asked their opinions regarding sending asylum seekers back to their country of origin. This study found that compared to individuals who move in search of better economic prospects, asylum seekers who apply out of concern of political, religious, or ethnic persecution had a higher acceptance rate.

Kotzur et al. (2017) found that the choice of terminology to refer to people who flee from adverse living situations does matter. Their findings showed that economic refugees were evaluated more negatively than war refugees or refugees. Likewise, Wyszynski et al. (2020) showed that the word refugee elicited dependency-oriented helping intentions. The term economic migrants, on the other hand, increased opposition to help and decreased help affirmation. These findings indicate that the terminology used to refer to asylum seekers and refugees can impact people's attitudes towards them. In addition to the impact of terminology, Ditlmann et al. (2017) found that the choice of message type in interracial interactions also matters. Specifically, the study showed that participants showed greater engagement, attentiveness, and motivation in conversation when they received an affiliation message from an African American partner, as opposed to a no-affiliation message.

### 3 | THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The central prediction of this work is that motivations attributed into newcomers will affect reactions to them. This is expected on the grounds of several theories. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals have a basic need for safety, security, and predictability in their lives (Maslow et al., 1997). These safety needs include protection from harm, freedom from fear and anxiety, and a need for order and structure. Social Exchange Theory further explains how individuals weigh the costs and benefits of helping others (Emerson, 1976). When it comes to helping asylum seekers, providing assistance to those in safety needs is seen as a moral obligation and thus carries a greater benefit than financial gain. Conversely, helping an asylum seeker for financial reasons may be perceived as charity and lacking in moral obligation. Moreover, safety motivation is proposed to elicit more positive responses than financial gain motivation because this pattern would mirror legislation in Western countries, which generally suggests that fearing for one's life is a legitimate reason for claiming asylum, but that financial betterment is not. This is a pervasive idea in Western countries with a long tradition, and we expected popular opinion to therefore be aligned with this general principle.

The aim of the present study is to explore, in a British context, how people react to asylum seekers' motivations, and how those motivations affect willingness to help, empathy, and prejudice towards asylum seekers.

Newcomers often have to deal with negative attitudes from host countries (Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018). Reducing prejudice to achieve a sufficient level of integration of immigrants, especially refugees, is an important challenge facing contemporary western countries

(Genkova & Groesdonk, 2022). Moreover, individuals who are highly empathic are more supportive of tolerant and inclusive legislative policies for accepting refugees than those who are less empathic (Hartley & Pedersen, 2007). Teenagers with higher levels of empathy showed more inclusiveness toward their Syrian peer who was bullied (Gönültaş et al., 2021). Greater forcedness and associated risks distinguish refugee migration from nonrefugee migration. The impact of numerous psychological variables that influence prosocial behaviour can be moderated by perceptions of migration's forcibility and associated risks (Echterhoff et al., 2022).

We expected that in the British context, people would react more favourably to asylum seekers who were seen to be motivated by concerns for their safety rather than by a desire for economic betterment, replicating existing findings in a new context. Previous research has either focused on settings other than the United Kingdom (e.g., the Netherlands; Onraet et al., 2021), or it had a political science focus rather than psychological (Bansak et al., 2016), not conceptualizing the psychological factors such as prejudice and helping that migrants go through. Our approach extends previous work to another national setting, and also adds a focus on psychological variables predicting willingness to help refugees, as well as empathy and prejudice. The first hypothesis this work aimed to test was whether, in the United Kingdom, reactions to asylum seekers would be more favorable if the perceived motivation for moving to a new country was safety concerns, rather than financial incentives.

Importantly, we expected a specific individual asylum seeker's motivation for seeking asylum might generalize to their group as a whole. Such generalization effects have been demonstrated in other contexts, for example, intergroup contact, where contact with one specific outgroup member can render more positive attitudes towards other, never contacted outgroup members too (Allport, 1954; Binder et al., 2009; Kotzur et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Therefore, we expected that the motivation of one specific asylum seeker would affect not only attitudes towards that individual but also towards that person's group overall.

In addition, we intended to demonstrate that reactions to outgroups are shaped by their specific characteristics, resulting in differences in the way different minority groups are treated to (Bourhis, 2017). For example, in an effort to explain why the outcry of the British public was so marked following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, some commentators emphasized that the people rendered refugees "look like us" (Bayoumi, 2022). There is also evidence that we empathise more easily with people who are similar to us (Stürmer & Siem, 2017), and with people who share our group memberships (Stürmer et al., 2006). Because of this, we also predicted that, overall, the reaction (willingness to help, empathy, prejudice) of British participants to Ukrainian asylum seekers would be more positive than to Syrian asylum seekers, due to greater cultural and ethnic differences between the United Kingdom and Syria, compared to Ukraine.

Finally, as we will elaborate on further below, another focus of this research was to test the effects of different *degrees* of perceived

financial hardship that asylum seekers may be escaping. Although the public discourse is focused mainly on a dichotomous distinction between asylum seekers fleeing persecution (who are perceived as more legitimate), compared to asylum seekers who want financial betterment (who are rejected as not legitimate), in reality, there are, of course, different degrees of financial desolation, even though these are not typically featured in public discourse about migration. However, extreme financial destitution can endanger individual safety (e.g., when there is not enough money for food and a danger of death by starvation, or not enough money for heating and a danger of freezing to death). As mentioned above, many asylum seekers might be motivated by both safety and financial concerns, and financial concerns themselves might be more or less severe, despite the dichotomous way in which these issues are often discussed in the media. A further objective of this work was therefore to test the effect of different degrees of financial hardship on attitudes toward asylum seekers.

## 4 | HYPOTHESES

In the studies we present, participants read fictitious articles about an asylum seeker's motivation (safety seeking or financial concerns) for seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. In study 1, we tested whether motivation by an asylum seeker for seeking safety will produce more help for this individual than motivation for financial betterment (H1a). We also tested whether this effect would generalize to the asylum seeker's group as a whole, so that for the whole group too more help would result if safety motivations rather than financial motivations are salient (H1b). Moreover, given the outpouring of sympathy among the British public towards the Ukrainian people immediately following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we expected that the specific Ukrainian outgroup member would be more readily helped than the specific Syrian outgroup member (H2a) and that there would be more willingness to help all Ukrainian refugees overall compared to Syrian refugees (H2b). We also explored if the same patterns apply to empathy and prejudice with empathy being higher and prejudice being lower if the asylum seeker has a safety motivation (vs. financial) and is from Ukraine (vs. from Syria). Study 2 was a preregistered replication of study 1. Prejudice and empathy analyses were exploratory; the preregistered predictions focused only on willingness to help.

In study 3, we added complexity by acknowledging that a motivation for financial betterment can arise from a relative position of comfort (living conditions are not luxurious but acceptable), or from a position of extreme lack (insufficient resources for heating, food, and shelter). Hence, we added a distinction between moderate financial concerns and extreme financial concerns. We tested a preregistered hypothesis which specified that extreme financial concerns attributed into asylum seekers (e.g., limited access to food or electricity) will produce more help toward a specific asylum seeker (H3a) and her group as a whole (H3b) compared to moderate financial concerns (e.g., no access to posh cars). Moreover, we tested whether

the effect described above in H1a and H1b would generalize to a new refugee outgroup (Yemen). Once again, we predicted that a perceived safety motivation would result in more helping than moderate financial concerns. We also explored whether the same patterns apply to empathy and prejudice, so that empathy would be higher with that target, and prejudice would be lower towards the target, who would also receive more help. Tests for prejudice and empathy were exploratory only, the main target of the preregistered predictions centred on willingness to help. All relevant preregistrations, materials, and data for all studies in this paper can be accessed via the following OSF link: [https://osf.io/m3eap/?view\\_only=35800decb4a144baaa42f4b18d138bab](https://osf.io/m3eap/?view_only=35800decb4a144baaa42f4b18d138bab).

## 5 | STUDY 1

In this study, we explored the effects of asylum seekers' motivations for seeking asylum and whether people would be more willing to help asylum seekers, be more empathetic and less prejudiced when asylum seekers were motivated by safety concerns rather than a desire for financial betterment. We also explored whether reactions would differ towards Ukrainian compared to Syrian refugees.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 | Participants

We recruited 318 White British participants (225 female, 93 male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 46.10$  years,  $SD = 13.97$ ) from the online recruitment platform Prolific Academic. Participants were compensated at the rate of £5 per hour for their time. In all three studies, only participants who self-identified as white British, were born in the United Kingdom, and were current UK residents at the time of the study were included.

We found that the typical effect size in the literature that considers other predictors of helping is  $f = 0.18$  (Zagefka & Sun, 2021). We conducted sensitivity power analysis on G\*power (Erdfelder et al., 1996) and the results showed that our sample size afforded 90% power to detect an effect size of  $f = 0.17$  in between-subject analysis of variance (ANOVA).

### 5.2 | Procedure

We randomly assigned participants to one of four experimental conditions, each varying in the country of origin and motivation of the asylum seeker. Participants in each condition read a fictitious passage from a BBC News story quoting either a Syrian or Ukrainian asylum seeker, who was described as having either a safety or financial motivation for coming to the United Kingdom. Participants then responded to a questionnaire measuring their willingness to help, prejudice, and empathy. Unless otherwise specified, all items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree."

Finally, participants completed manipulation and comprehension checks and provided demographic information.

## 5.3 | Materials

### 5.3.1 | Manipulation

Participants read the following instructions: “Esma [Elena] is a Syrian [Ukrainian] refugee who is claiming asylum in the UK. Now you will read a passage from a BBC News story quoting from her.” The text in the fictitious articles was identical except for the manipulated variables (country of origin and motivation). The text in the safety condition was “I am a Syrian [Ukrainian] asylum-seeker in the UK. We left our country because it is *not safe for us to live there*. We wanted to come here to *be somewhere where we don't have to be scared and to feel safer*. We're just looking for *safety* because we don't want to *live with constant fear*, and no hope for the future. Syrians [Ukrainians] at home *are not able to relax and feel secure*. Their lives are *constantly in danger*. We are so happy to have an opportunity to start a new life in the UK. In Britain, we can work and live *without constant fear*. There are many opportunities for us here, and most of us *can finally feel safe and breathe more easily*.” The text in the financial condition was “I am a Syrian [Ukrainian] asylum-seeker in the UK. We left our country because it is *poor*. We wanted to come here to *escape poverty* and *make more money*. We're just looking for *more money* because we don't want to *live in poverty anymore*, with no hope for the future. Syrians [Ukrainians] at home *don't have access to things like nice clothing, homes or cars*. Their lives are *very poor*. We are so happy to have an opportunity to start a new life in the UK. In Britain, we can work and live *without deprivation*. There are many opportunities for us here, and most of us can *find a job and become better off*.”

### 5.3.2 | Willingness to help

We measured helping in relation to the willingness to help the specific individual featured in the fictitious article, and refugees from the country of origin (Syria or Ukraine) in general. We adapted items from Zagefka et al. (2012). To measure help offered to the specific individual featured in the article, we used three items: “I would be willing to give a donation to Esma [Elena],” “I think it is important to donate money to Esma [Elena],” and “I think it is the right thing to do to donate money to Esma [Elena],”  $\alpha = .95$ . To measure help for the whole outgroup, we used five items: “I would be willing to give donations to Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees,” “I think it is important to give donations to Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees,” “I think it is the right thing to do to give donations to Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees,” “I think everyone should donate money to Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees,” “I would give the maximum amount I could afford to Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees,”  $\alpha = .93$ . For all multi-item scales, we used the mean score of items in the analyses.

### 5.3.3 | Prejudice

We measured prejudice (towards the specific individual, not towards the group as a whole<sup>2</sup>) using 5 items from Anderson (2018), but adapted them to the targets of this study: “Esma” (Syrian asylum seeker) and “Elena” (Ukrainian asylum seeker). We used “classical prejudice” against asylum seekers subscale in this study<sup>3</sup>. Classical prejudice is an old-fashioned and explicit form of prejudice; negative attitudes towards outgroup members are overtly displayed. We used 5 items: “Esma [Elena] needs to go back to where she came from,” “Esma [Elena] is a waste of time, money and space,” “Esma [Elena] is more trouble than she's worth,” “Esma [Elena] just pretends to need help,” “Esma [Elena] is too dangerous to have in our country”  $\alpha = .90$ .

### 5.3.4 | Empathy

To measure empathy, we took three items from (Spreng et al., 2009), and adapted them to the targets of this study. We measured empathy for the specific individual portrayed in the fictitious articles with three items: “I have tender, concerned feelings for Esma [Elena],” “I am very interested in how Esma [Elena] feels,” “I feel kind of protective towards Esma [Elena],”  $\alpha = .91$ . For the outgroup as a whole we used the following three items: “I have tender, concerned feelings for Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees,” “I am very interested in how Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees feel,” “When I see a Syrian [Ukrainian] refugee being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him/her,”  $\alpha = .90$ .

### 5.3.5 | Beliefs about safety and financial motivation

To check the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants answered questions about the perceived motivation of the asylum seeker portrayed in the fictitious news article. We used four items for safety motivation beliefs: “Esma [Elena] wants to come to the UK because she wants to live in safety,” “Esma [Elena] wants to come to the UK because she wants to live in a secure society,” “Esma [Elena] wants to leave her homeland because her life is under threat,” “Esma [Elena] wants to leave her homeland because her country is dangerous,”  $\alpha = .88$ .

We used four items to measure financial motivation beliefs: “Esma [Elena] wants to come to the UK because she wants to be rich,” “Esma [Elena] wants to come to the UK because she wants to have a better lifestyle,” “Esma [Elena] wants to leave her homeland because her country is poor,” “Esma [Elena] wants to leave her homeland because there are not many job opportunities in her country,”  $\alpha = .86$ .

### 5.3.6 | Demographics, comprehension, and attention check

Some demographic questions (sex, age, ethnicity, and migration background), one attention check and two comprehension check

questions were also used. For the attention check, we used the following item; “It’s important that you pay attention to this study. Please tick ‘Strongly Disagree.’” For the comprehension check, the following items; “Where did Esmā [Elena] come from? a. Syria b. Afghanistan c. Ukraine d. Venezuela,” “What did Esmā [Elena] state as the reason for leaving her country? a. Poverty and material considerations b. Safety concerns c. To follow a boyfriend d. Crop failure.” No participant failed in more than one of the check questions; therefore, no participant was excluded from the study.

## 5.4 | Results

### 5.4.1 | Manipulation check

To check the effectiveness of the manipulation, we conducted a 2 (motivation manipulation: financial, safety)  $\times$  2 (beliefs about motivation: financial, safety) ANOVA, with repeated measures on the second factor. There was a significant main effect of the motivation manipulation,  $F_{(1,316)} = 54.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.06$ , and of beliefs about motivation,  $F_{(1,316)} = 232.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.32$ . In line with what would be expected of an effective manipulation, the interaction was also significant,  $F_{(1,316)} = 531.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.52$ . Specifically, participants in the safety motivation condition scored higher on safety beliefs ( $M = 4.69$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) than on financial beliefs ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ), whereas participants in the financial motivation condition scored higher on financial beliefs ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) than on safety beliefs ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ). These results suggest that the manipulation had the intended effect.

### 5.4.2 | Analyses for the individual asylum seeker

We performed a robust 2 (motivation: financial, safety)  $\times$  2 (country of origin: Syrian, Ukrainian) between-subjects ANOVA predicting willingness to donate to help the individual asylum seeker. The main effects of motivation,  $F_{(1,314)} = 53.08$ ,  $MSE = 1.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.101$ , and country of origin,  $F_{(1,314)} = 4.28$ ,  $MSE = 1.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.027$ , on willingness to donate to the individual were both significant. In line with the hypotheses, participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) wanted to donate more than participants in the financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). Furthermore, participants wanted to help more when the refugee in question was from Ukraine ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) compared to when the refugee was from Syria ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,314)} = 0$ ,  $MSE = 1.03$ ,  $p = 1$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.001$ .

Next, we tested the effects of “motivation” and “country of origin” on classical prejudice toward the individual asylum seeker, again using a robust between-subjects ANOVA. The main effects of motivation,  $F_{(1,314)} = 9.06$ ,  $MSE = 0.33$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.014$ , and country of origin,  $F_{(1,314)} = 25.17$ ,  $MSE = 0.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.028$ , were both significant. Participants in the financial motivation

condition ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) were more prejudiced towards the individual outgroup member than participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). Furthermore, participants scored higher on prejudice when the refugee in question was from Syria ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) compared to when the refugee was from Ukraine ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,314)} = 0$ ,  $MSE = 0.33$ ,  $p = 1$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.004$ .

We then tested the effect of “motivation” and “country of origin” on empathy towards the individual asylum seeker, using a robust between-subjects ANOVA. The main effects of motivation,  $F_{(1,314)} = 19.30$ ,  $MSE = 0.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.064$ , and country of origin,  $F_{(1,314)} = 7.93$ ,  $MSE = 0.89$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.025$ , on empathy were both significant. Participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) empathized more with the individual asylum seeker than participants in the financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). Furthermore, participants empathized more when the asylum seeker was from Ukraine ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) compared to from Syria ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,314)} = -0.08$ ,  $MSE = 0.89$ ,  $p = 1$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.002$ .

### 5.4.3 | Analyses for the asylum seeker's group as a whole

To test the effect of the “motivation” and “country of origin” conditions on willingness to donate to the asylum seeker's group overall, we conducted a robust two-way between-subjects ANOVA. The main effects of motivation,  $F_{(1,314)} = 4.93$ ,  $MSE = 0.84$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.014$ , and country of origin,  $F_{(1,314)} = 40.43$ ,  $MSE = 0.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.101$ , on willingness to donate to the whole outgroup were both significant. Participants in the safety motivation ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) condition wanted to donate more than participants in the financial motivation condition ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Furthermore, participants wanted to help Ukrainian refugees ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) more than Syrian refugees ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,314)} = 3.56$ ,  $MSE = 0.84$ ,  $p = .060$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.009$ .

We finally tested the effect of motivation and country of origin on empathy with the group overall, again using a robust between-subjects ANOVA. The main effect of motivation on empathy with the outgroup as a whole was not significant,  $F_{(1,314)} = 0$ ,  $MSE = 0.74$ ,  $p = 1$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.001$ , but the main effect of the country of origin,  $F_{(1,314)} = 67.81$ ,  $MSE = 0.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.104$ , on empathy with the group was significant. Participants' levels of empathizing with asylum seekers did not differ in terms of safety ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) and financial conditions ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). Participants empathized with Ukrainian refugees ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) more compared to Syrian refugees ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,314)} = 0$ ,  $MSE = 0.74$ ,  $p = 1$ ,  $\eta^2_G = 0.006$ . Figure 1 shows the bar graph for the results of study 1.

## 5.5 | Discussion

Overall, our results were in line with our hypotheses. Participants reported more willingness to help asylum seekers described as motivated by safety rather than financial betterment. As expected, this effect was evident when it came to helping the individual asylum seeker from the article participants read (H1a), but it also generalized to helping the asylum seeker's group as a whole (i.e., other refugees; H1b). In line with expectations, the willingness to help refugees from Ukraine was stronger than the willingness to help refugees from Syria (H2a & H2b). Additionally, the two factors did not interact, suggesting that—as expected—the effect of “motivation” on “helping” was evident across different refugee targets from different countries of origin.

We also found similar results for prejudice and empathy. Safety motivation elicited more empathy and less prejudice towards a specific asylum seeker, compared to financial motivation. Motivation did not affect empathy toward the broader asylum seeker groups, however. Overall, both the specific Ukrainian asylum seeker and whole Ukrainian refugees received more empathy and less prejudice than the specific Syrian asylum seeker and whole Syrian refugees.

## 6 | STUDY 2

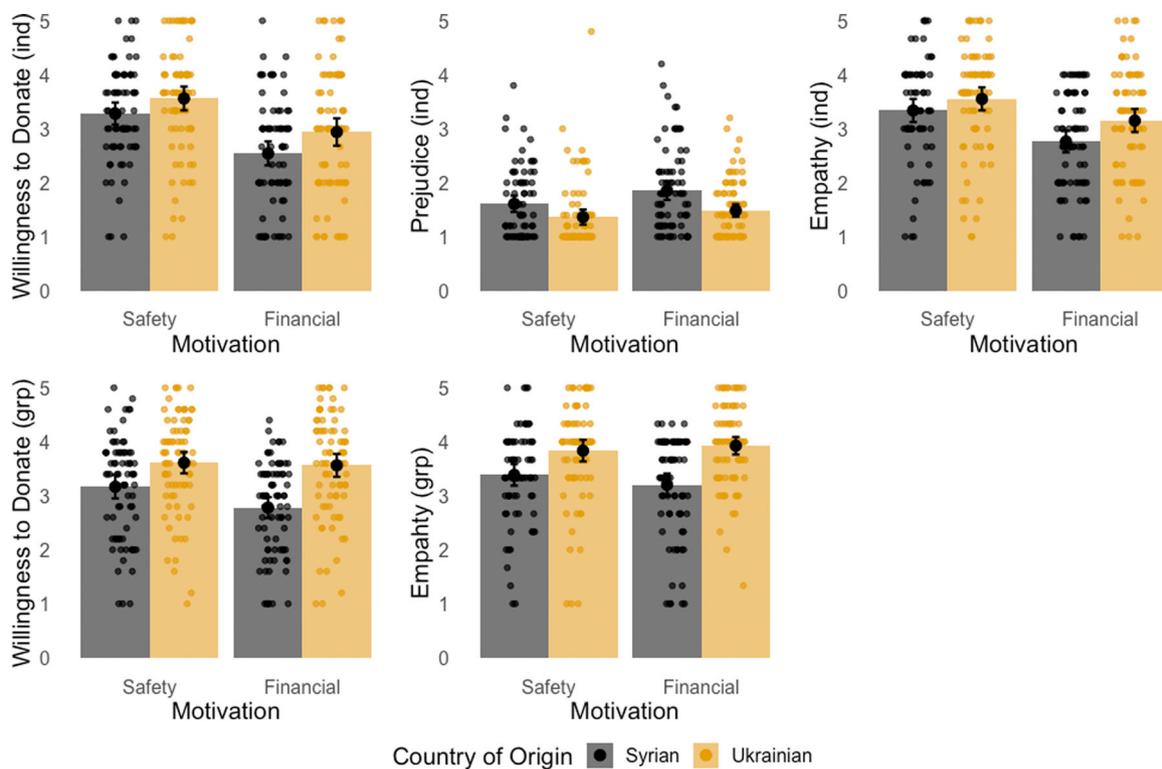
The first study showed that people want to help refugees motivated to seek safety rather than financial betterment. Study 2 aimed to replicate the previous findings, but this time we preregistered the

study. We used largely the same materials and manipulation as in study 1 and again expected that people would be more willing to help the individual asylum seeker (H1a) and their group as a whole (H1b) if the asylum seeker's stated motivation was safety rather than for financial betterment. Furthermore, we also expected participants to be once again more willing to help the specific Ukrainian asylum seeker compared to the specific Syrian asylum seeker (H2a), and all Ukrainian refugees compared to all Syrian refugees (H2b).

In addition, as in study 1, we tested whether the asylum seeker's motivation would affect not only helping intention but also empathy and prejudice. We expected, in line with the results of study 1, that motivation to seek safety would elicit more empathy and less prejudice towards both the specific asylum-seeking individual and their group as a whole. However, it should be noted that hypotheses and analyses regarding empathy and prejudice were not preregistered and were only exploratory.

## 6.1 | Participants

We recruited 152 White British participants (127 female, 25 male;  $M_{age} = 48.46$  years,  $SD = 13.82$ ) from Prolific. Participants were compensated at the rate of £5 per hour for their time. According to a power analysis conducted in G\*power (Erdfeulder et al., 1996), we needed 108 participants to achieve 80% power to detect a minimum effect size of  $f = 0.33$  in a Factorial ANOVA which was the effect size of the motivation manipulation on donation to the individual in study 1.



**FIGURE 1** Effects of Asylum Seeker's Motivation and Country of Origin on Willingness to Donate, Prejudice and Empathy in study 1. The upper figures show the means for a specific asylum seeker and the lower figures show the means for the group as a whole. Error bars show 95% confidence interval.

However, to give us maximum likelihood to find the effect, we oversampled, as stated in the preregistration.

## 6.2 | Design and material

### 6.2.1 | Procedure

The procedure followed that of study 1.

## 6.3 | Materials

### 6.3.1 | Manipulation

We used the same manipulations as in study 1, with participants assigned to read about a Ukrainian or Syrian asylum seeker with either a financial or safety motivation.

### 6.3.2 | Willingness to help

We use the same scales as in the first study, for help offered to the individual outgroup member mentioned in the manipulation ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and helping for the outgroup as a whole ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

### 6.3.3 | Prejudice

To measure prejudice, we used a feeling thermometer this time for both individual outgroup member and outgroup as a whole. Participants were asked “How positively do you feel about Esma [Elena]?” and “How positively do you feel about Syrian [Ukrainian] refugees in general?”

### 6.3.4 | Empathy

For both the individual asylum seeker ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and the outgroup as a whole ( $\alpha = .91$ ) we used the same scales as in the first study.

### 6.3.5 | Beliefs about safety and financial motivation

To test the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants answered questions about the asylum seeker's motivation. We used the same questions as in study 1 for both safety ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and financial beliefs ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

### 6.3.6 | Demographics and comprehension check

We used the same demographics questions, one attention check question, and two comprehension check questions as in study 1. We

used one more attention check in this study: “It's important that you pay attention to this study. Please tick ‘Somewhat agree’.” Since no participant failed more than one check question, no participants were excluded.

## 6.4 | Results

### 6.4.1 | Manipulation check

To check the effectiveness of the manipulation, we performed a 2 (motivation manipulation: financial, safety)  $\times$  2 (beliefs about motivation: financial, safety) ANOVA, with repeated measures on the second factor. There was a significant main effect of the motivation manipulation,  $F_{(1,150)} = 8.58$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.02$  and of beliefs about motivation,  $F_{(1,150)} = 42.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.15$ . As would be expected from an effective manipulation, the interaction was also significant,  $F_{(1,150)} = 419.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.64$ . Participants in the safety motivation condition scored higher on safety beliefs ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ) than on financial beliefs ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ), whereas participants in the financial motivation condition scored higher on financial beliefs ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ), than safety beliefs ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). These results suggest that the manipulation had the intended effect.

We conducted a 2 (motivation: financial, safety)  $\times$  2 (country of origin: Syrian, Ukrainian) between-subjects ANOVA predicting willingness to donate to help the individual asylum seeker. The main effect of motivation,  $F_{(1,148)} = 45.03$ ,  $MSE = 0.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.233$ , on willingness to donate to the individual was significant, but the main effect for country of origin,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.38$ ,  $MSE = 0.90$ ,  $p = .540$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.003$ , was not significant. In line with our hypothesis, participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) wanted to donate more than participants in the financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Participants did not differ in terms of willingness to help the specific Syrian ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and Ukrainian ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) asylum seeker in the fictitious article. There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.99$ ,  $MSE = 0.90$ ,  $p = .320$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.007$ .

### 6.4.2 | Analyses for the individual asylum seeker

Next, we tested the effects of “motivation” and “country of origin” on prejudice toward the specific asylum seeker, using a between-subjects ANOVA. The main effect of motivation,  $F_{(1,148)} = 32.00$ ,  $MSE = 0.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.178$ , on prejudice against the individual was significant, but the main effect for country of origin,  $F_{(1,148)} = 1.62$ ,  $MSE = 0.80$ ,  $p = .205$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.011$ , was not significant. Participants in the “safety motivation” condition ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ) were less prejudiced against the specific asylum seeker than participants in the “financial motivation” condition ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). Participants did not differ in their prejudice towards the

specific Syrian ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and Ukrainian ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) asylum seeker in the fictional article. There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.01$ ,  $MSE = 0.80$ ,  $p = .907$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.000$ .

We further tested the effect of “motivation” and “country of origin” on empathy towards the individual asylum seeker, using a between-subjects ANOVA. The main effect of motivation  $F_{(1,148)} = 18.77$ ,  $MSE = 1.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.113$ , on empathy towards the individual was significant, but the main effect for country of origin,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.13$ ,  $MSE = 1.07$ ,  $p = .724$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.001$ , was not significant. Participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) empathized more with the individual outgroup member than participants in the financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). The level of empathy of the participants did not differ whether the asylum seeker depicted in the news item was from Syria ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) or Ukraine ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.76$ ,  $MSE = 1.07$ ,  $p = .385$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.005$ .

### 6.4.3 | Analyses for the asylum seeker's group as a whole

To test the effect of the “motivation” and “country of origin” conditions on willingness to donate to the asylum seeker's group overall, we conducted a two-way between-subjects ANOVA. The main effects of motivation  $F_{(1,148)} = 6.85$ ,  $MSE = 0.88$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.044$ , and country of origin,  $F_{(1,148)} = 8.83$ ,  $MSE = 0.88$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.056$ , on willingness to donate to the were both significant. Participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) wanted to donate more than participants in the financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Furthermore, participants wanted to offer more help to Ukrainian refugees ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) compared to Syrian refugees ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.36$ ,  $MSE = 0.88$ ,  $p = .551$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.002$ .

Next, we tested the effect of motivation and country of origin on prejudice with the group overall using a between-subjects ANOVA. The main effect of country of origin,  $F_{(1,148)} = 8.48$ ,  $MSE = 0.92$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.054$ , on prejudice against the whole outgroup was significant, but the main effect of motivation,  $F_{(1,148)} = 1.57$ ,  $MSE = 0.92$ ,  $p = .212$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.011$ , was not significant. Respondents' prejudice against refugees did not differ in terms of safety ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) and financial motivation conditions ( $M = 2.42$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). Participants were more prejudiced toward Syrian refugees ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) compared to Ukrainian refugees ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.04$ ,  $MSE = 0.92$ ,  $p = .843$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.000$ .

We finally tested the effect of motivation and country of origin on empathy with the group overall, again using a between-subjects ANOVA. The main effect of country of origin,  $F_{(1,148)} = 5.83$ ,  $MSE = 0.94$ ,  $p = .017$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.038$ , on empathy with the whole outgroup was significant, but the main effect of motivation,

$F_{(1,148)} = 1.82$ ,  $MSE = 0.94$ ,  $p = .180$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.012$ , on empathy with the group was not significant. Participants' empathy levels towards refugees did not differ depending on safety ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) and financial motivation ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). Participants were more empathetic towards Ukrainian refugees ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ) compared to Syrian refugees ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ). There was no significant interaction between the two factors,  $F_{(1,148)} = 0.05$ ,  $MSE = 0.94$ ,  $p = .820$ ,  $\eta_G^2 = 0.000$ . Figure 2 shows the bar graph for the results of study 2.

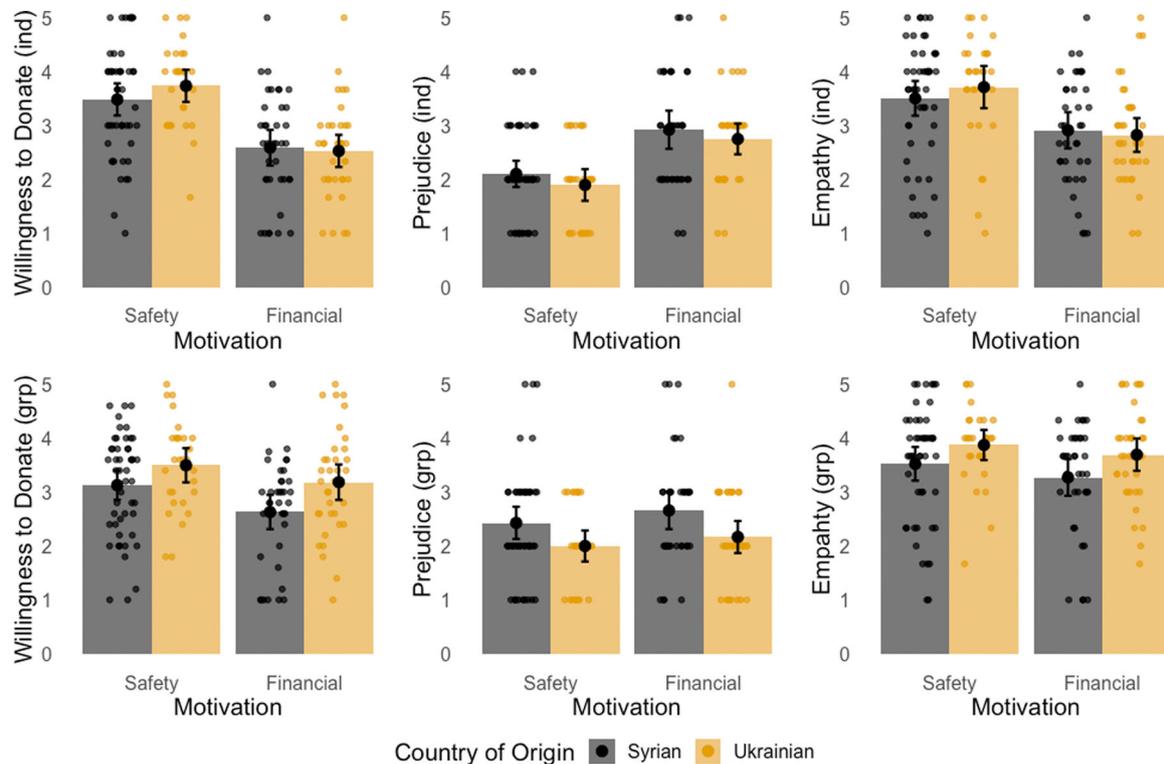
## 6.5 | Discussion

This study provided confirmatory evidence that asylum seekers' motivation for coming to a new country affects the degree to which people are willing to help them. As in study 1, safety motivation elicited more prosocial reactions than financial motivation (H1a & H1b). This effect held across different refugee groups in this study: Ukraine and Syria. We also again found evidence that helping is more readily forthcoming for some refugee groups compared to others. Again, the overall pattern indicated a more positive response towards Ukrainian refugees rather than Syrian refugees. However, this time “country of origin” only had an effect on willingness to help the group (H2b) as a whole but not the individual refugee mentioned in the manipulation (H2a). This difference between studies 1 and 2 may be explained by the time of data collection. The first study was conducted less than a month after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the second study 2 months after that. The initial sympathy with Ukrainians following the Russian invasion may have waned over time, making the pattern less strong. For prejudice and empathy, we found a pattern similar to that of study 1. Safety concerns elicited more empathy and less prejudice towards a specific asylum seeker (although these effects did not reach significance for empathy and prejudice towards the group as a whole). Overall, all Ukrainian refugees received more empathy and less prejudice than all Syrian refugees (although these effects did not reach significance for the individual asylum seeker).

Having firmly established that asylum seekers' motivations affect reactions to them, next, we sought to test whether different gradations of financial need might elicit different responses in study 3.

## 7 | STUDY 3

The two previous studies showed that refugees who are motivated by safety concerns rather than financial concerns generate more willingness to help. Indeed, popular discourse suggests that lay people make a distinction between the safety and financial concerns attributed to refugees. Typically, the pattern that emerges is that safety concerns are cited as legitimate reasons for why refugees should be offered shelter, whereas a motivation for financial betterment is frequently not portrayed as a legitimate reason for refugees to seek assistance (Bansak et al., 2016; Onraet et al., 2021).



**FIGURE 2** Effects of Asylum Seeker's Motivation and Country of Origin on Willingness to Donate, Prejudice and Empathy in study 2. The upper figures show the means for a specific asylum seeker and the lower figures show the means for the group as a whole. Error bars show 95% confidence interval.

That said, in reality safety and financial concerns are not as conceptually distinct as lay discourse suggests: Financial concerns can turn into safety concerns when the financial situation is so dire that it threatens the safety of the person. For example, when there is no money to buy food, the person is in danger of starving to death, which clearly would be a threat to their physical safety. For example, in Yemen 16.2 million people suffer from food insecurity, with 5 million on the edge of famine (UNHCR, 2022c). The aim of this third study was to explore whether highlighting the extremity of financial hardship could successfully bring to the fore in participants' minds the implications for the refugees' legitimate need for assistance, thereby inducing greater willingness to help them. Therefore, in study 3 we expected that extreme financial concerns would generate greater willingness to help than moderate financial concerns toward the specific asylum seeker (H3a) and her entire group (H3b).

In addition, a further goal of this third study was to replicate the previous finding (H1a & H1b) but using a different refugee group to demonstrate the generalizability of the effects of motivation of refugees on willingness to help them affect across different target groups. Hence, we tested whether overall safety concerns would generate greater willingness to help than moderate financial motivation, as specified in H1a & H1b above, but this time generalized to a different group (i.e., Yemeni asylum seekers). This study and hypotheses regarding willingness to donate were preregistered.

Once again, we explored (without having any firm preregistered hypotheses about this) how prejudice and empathy were affected by motivation.

## 7.1 | Participants

We recruited 120 White British participants (95 female, 24 male, 1 nonbinary;  $M_{\text{age}} = 39.68$  years,  $SD = 13.35$ ) from Prolific. We calculated that was the minimum sample we would need to detect the effect of motivation (safety vs. moderate financial motivation) on donation to the individual from our previous studies. Based on the results of the previous studies,  $N = 120$  afforded 90% power to detect a minimum effect size of  $f = 0.33$  in a between-subject ANOVA. Participants were compensated at the rate of £6.77 per hour for their time.

## 7.2 | Procedure

We randomly assigned participants to one of three experimental conditions, each varying motivation of the asylum seeker. Participants in each condition read a fictitious passage from a BBC News story quoting a Yemeni asylum seeker, who was described as having either a safety, moderate financial or extreme financial motivation for coming to the United Kingdom.

Participants then responded to a questionnaire measuring their willingness to help, prejudice, and empathy. Finally, participants completed manipulation and comprehension checks and provided demographic information.

## 7.3 | Materials

### 7.3.1 | Manipulation

We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: safety motivation, moderate financial motivation, or extreme financial motivation. In all three conditions, participants were given the following instruction: “Elmira is a Yemeni refugee who is claiming asylum in the United Kingdom. Now you will read a passage from a BBC News story quoting from her.” We used almost the exact same scripts for the safety and moderate financial conditions as in the previous studies. We only took out the last sentence to make the script short and concise. The wording for the extreme financial concern condition was constructed in parallel to the other two conditions, again taking care to keep everything constant to avoid confounds, and to only vary the crucial variable of interest, i.e. the motivation for fleeing that the refugees were portrayed to have. The refugee in all three conditions was purported to be from Yemen.

The script for the “safety motivation” condition is “I am a Yemeni asylum-seeker in the UK. We left our country because it is *not safe for us to live there*. We wanted to come here to be *somewhere where we don't have to be scared and to feel safer*. We're just looking for *safety because we don't want to live with constant fear*, and no hope for the future. Yemenis at home *are not able to relax and feel secure*. Their lives are *constantly in danger*. We are so happy to have an opportunity to start a new life in the UK. In Britain, we can work and live without constant fear.”

The script for the ‘extreme financial motivation’ condition is “I am a Yemeni asylum-seeker in the UK. We left our country because it is *desperately poor*. We wanted to come here to *escape extreme poverty and starvation*. We are just looking for *some way to survive because we don't want to live in extreme poverty anymore*, with no hope for the future. Yemenis at home *don't have access to things like food or electricity*. Their lives are *extremely poor*. We are so happy to have an opportunity to start a new life in the United Kingdom. In Britain, we can work and live without worrying *about starving to death*.”

The script for the ‘moderate financial motivation’ condition is “I am a Yemeni asylum-seeker in the UK. We left our country because it is *poor*. We wanted to come here to *escape poverty and make more money*. We're just looking for *more money because we don't want to live in poverty anymore*, with no hope for the future. Yemenis at home *don't have access to things like nice clothing, homes or cars*. Their lives are *very poor*. We are so happy to have an opportunity to start a new life in the UK. In Britain, we can work and live *without deprivation*.”

### 7.3.2 | Willingness to help

We used the same scales as in the first study, for the measure of help offered to the specific outgroup individual in the scenario ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and for the outgroup as a whole ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

### 7.3.3 | Prejudice

We used the same feeling thermometer questions from study 2.

### 7.3.4 | Empathy

We used the same scales as in the first study, both for the measure of empathy toward to the specific outgroup individual in the scenario ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and for the outgroup as a whole ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

### 7.3.5 | Beliefs about safety, extreme and moderate financial beliefs

We used 6 items to check whether the manipulation worked. For “safety motivation,” two items were used: “Elmira wants to come to the United Kingdom because she wants to live in safety,” “Elmira wants to leave her homeland because her life is under threat,”  $\alpha = .87$ . For “moderate financial motivation,” two items were used: “Elmira wants to come to the UK because she wants to be rich,” “Elmira wants to leave her homeland because there are not many job opportunities in her country,”  $\alpha = .51$ . For “extreme financial motivation,” two items were used: “Elmira wants to come to the UK because she doesn't want to starve,” “Elmira wants to leave her homeland because her country is extremely deprived,”  $\alpha = .70$ .

### 7.3.6 | Demographics and comprehension check

We used the same demographic questions, two attention check questions, and two comprehension check questions as in study 1. Since no participant failed more than one of the check questions, no participants were excluded from the study.

## 7.4 | Results

### 7.4.1 | Manipulation check

A one-way mixed ANOVA was conducted with the experimental manipulation as IV and the three motivation belief scales as three levels of a repeated measures factor to check whether the manipulation was effective. Because Mauchly's test of sphericity assumption was violated, Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used. The results showed that motivation beliefs were significantly affected

by the manipulation,  $F_{(2,117)} = 14.36, p < .001, \eta^2_G = 0.09$ . Moreover, ratings for safety, moderate and extreme financial beliefs were significantly different from each other,  $F_{(1.71,200.62)} = 186.57, p < .001, \eta^2_G = 0.49$ . The interaction was also significant,  $F_{(3.43,200.62)} = 59.88, p < .001, \eta^2_G = 0.38$ . Moreover, post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments showed that all the comparisons were significant,  $p < .01$ . These results suggest that the manipulation had the intended effect. As expected, the belief that was intended to be experimentally strengthened was stronger than the other beliefs in each of the three conditions.

To check the effectiveness of the manipulation, we conducted a 2 (motivation manipulation: financial, safety)  $\times$  2 (beliefs about motivation: financial, safety) ANOVA, with repeated measures on the second factor. There was a significant main effect of the motivation manipulation,  $F_{(1,316)} = 54.12, p < .001, \eta^2_G$  (generalized eta squared) = 0.06, and of beliefs about motivation,  $F_{(1,316)} = 232.55, p < .001, \eta^2_G = 0.32$ . In line with what would be expected of an effective manipulation, the interaction was also significant,  $F_{(1,316)} = 531.82, p < .001, \eta^2_G = 0.52$ . Specifically, participants in the safety motivation condition scored higher on safety beliefs ( $M = 4.69, SD = 0.44$ ) than on financial beliefs ( $M = 2.35, SD = 0.78$ ), whereas participants in the financial motivation condition scored higher on financial beliefs ( $M = 4.01, SD = 0.58$ ) than on safety beliefs ( $M = 3.62, SD = 0.84$ ). These results suggest that the manipulation had the intended effect.

#### 7.4.2 | Analyses for the individual asylum seeker

Using a one-way between-subjects ANOVA, we tested the effect of “motivation” on willingness to donate to the individual outgroup member mentioned in the manipulation. The main effect of motivation on willingness to donate to the individual was significant,  $F_{(2,117)} = 5.62, MSE = 0.99, p = .005, \eta^2_G = 0.088$ . Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments indicated that participants in the extreme financial condition ( $M = 3.45, SD = 0.96$ ) wanted to donate more than participants in the moderate financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.83, SD = 1.11, p = .02$ ), but on par with participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 3.45, SD = 0.85, p = 1$ ). This supports H3a. To test H1a as in the previous studies, the prediction that safety motivation would elicit more helping than moderate financial motivation, Bonferroni adjusted comparisons revealed that this comparison too was significant ( $p = .02$ ). This supports H1a.

We also conducted a one-way ANOVA to examine the effect of “motivation” on prejudice against the specific outgroup member described in the manipulation. The main effect of motivation on prejudice against the individual was significant,  $F_{(2,117)} = 5.59, MSE = 0.76, p = .005, \eta^2_G = 0.087$ . Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments indicated that participants in the extreme financial condition ( $M = 2.14, SD = 0.72$ ) were less prejudiced than participants in the moderate financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.67, SD = 0.97, p = .02$ ), but were just as prejudiced as participants in the safety motivation condition ( $M = 2.11, SD = 0.85, p = 1$ ). Safety

motivation also led to less prejudice than moderate financial motivation ( $p = .01$ ).

Next, we examined the effect of “motivation” on empathy with the particular member of the outgroup mentioned in the manipulation, again using a one-way ANOVA. The main effect of motivation on empathy with the individual was significant,  $F_{(2,117)} = 3.77, MSE = 0.97, p = .026, \eta^2_G = 0.061$ . Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments indicated that participants in the extreme financial condition ( $M = 3.48, SD = 0.88$ ) empathized with the specific individual more than participants in the moderate financial motivation condition ( $M = 2.91, SD = 1.09, p = .03$ ), but not differed from safety condition ( $M = 3.31, SD = 0.92, p = 1$ ). Participants in the safety motivation and moderate financial motivation conditions did not differ in empathy score towards a specific outgroup member ( $p = .21$ ).

#### 7.4.3 | Analyses for the asylum seeker's group as a whole

To test the effect of motivation on willingness to donate to the asylum seeker's group, their prejudice toward that group, and their empathy for that group, we conducted a series of a one-way ANOVAs. The main effect of motivation was not significant for willingness to donate to the group,  $F_{(2,117)} = 1.84, MSE = 0.91, p = .163, \eta^2_G = 0.031$ , prejudice towards the group,  $F_{(2,117)} = 1.46, MSE = 0.65, p = .236, \eta^2_G = 0.024$ , or empathy for the group was not significant,  $F_{(2,117)} = 0.96, MSE = 0.81, p = .385, \eta^2_G = 0.016$ . Figure 3 shows the bar graph for the results of study 3.

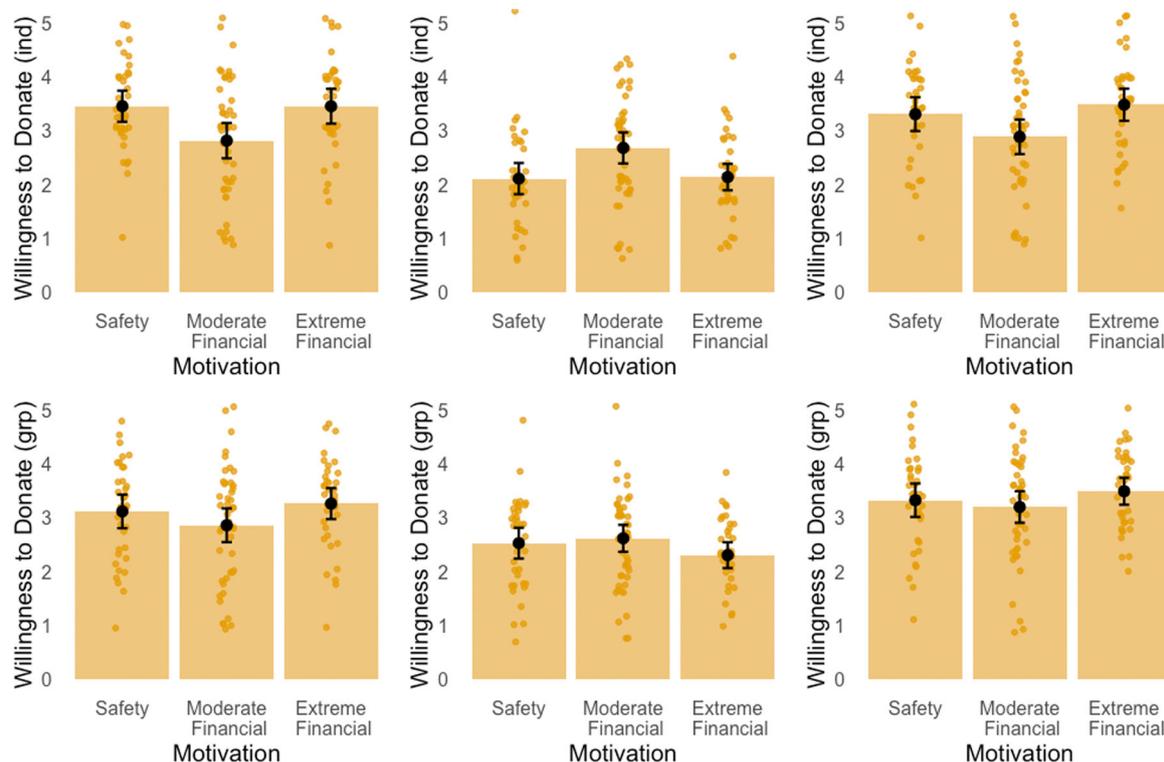
### 7.5 | Discussion

In this study, we again found that safety concerns generate greater willingness to help than moderate financial concerns (H1a). Moreover, we also found that extreme financial concerns elicit greater willingness to help than moderate financial concerns (H3a). However, this time we found this pattern only for the individual asylum seeker, but not their whole group (H1b, H3b). This may be because of the lack of power to detect this effect, as our power analysis was based on detecting effects for the individual, which were larger than for the group in studies 1 and 2 (as noted in the preregistration). Financial constraints prevented recruitment of a larger sample for a better-powered design.

Prejudice and empathy yielded similar results to helping, as well. Extreme financial concerns elicited more help, empathy, and less prejudice than moderate financial concerns for the specific asylum seeker, but at the same level as security concerns.

## 8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across three studies, we examined how refugees' motivation (safety, moderate financial, and extreme financial concerns) for seeking asylum affects people's willingness to help refugees. Overall, we



**FIGURE 3** Effects of Asylum Seeker's Motivation and Country of Origin on Willingness to Donate, Prejudice and Empathy in study 3. The upper figures show the means for a specific asylum seeker and the lower figures show the means for the group as a whole. Error bars show 95% confidence interval.

showed that refugees who were motivated by the desire to feel safe elicit greater willingness to donate, more empathy, and less prejudice than those who were driven by the desire to improve their financial situation. This is in line with Bansak et al. (2016) and Onraet et al.'s (2021) findings that people are less willing to accept asylum seekers whose motivation is economic betterment. People were more willing to help asylum seekers if their motivation was safety rather than financial. Furthermore, this effect applied not only to a specific individual outgroup member, but also (albeit in a less consistent way) to the outgroup as a whole. The generalization to the whole group can be explained by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Through a process of social categorization, people divide the world into outgroup ("them") and ingroup ("us"). While doing this, people tend to exaggerate both the similarities within a group and the disparities between them. In these studies, participants read a concise news article about a particular refugee, yet their helping decision toward the asylum seeker's whole group was affected by that.

Overall, Ukrainian refugees received more willingness to help than Syrian refugees. There could be several reasons that explain this finding. First, shared group membership (James & Zagefka, 2017) and familiarity with the victim and the area (Zagefka et al., 2013) increase levels of help. People are more willing to help people they think are similar to themselves (Dovidio et al., 1997). The distance from the victim reduces the emotional effect of the victim's suffering on potential aid providers, their moral obligation, and the expected

effect of their assistance on the victim's situation (Kogut et al., 2018). Ukrainians are white and European; therefore, they are likely to be perceived as more similar to British people and can be included as ingroup members more easily than Syrian people. Secondly, because Ukraine is geographically closer to the United Kingdom and is a European country, people may perceive more of an affinity to the threats these refugees encounter and fear further threats to themselves. Given Ukraine's close proximity to Britain, it is likely that some people have a personal connection to Ukrainians rather than Syrians. Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) suggests that interaction between members of different social groups can lead to an acceptance of the other group and a decrease in prejudice. Therefore, the potential for greater contact with Ukrainians compared to Syrians may have caused their prejudices against Ukrainians to lessen. Thirdly, victims of repeated adversity are believed to suffer less; and this affects people's decisions to help victims of repeated adversity (Zagefka, 2022). It is possible that Syrians are perceived as having suffered repeated adversity more so than Ukrainians. Furthermore, people assume that people from low socioeconomic status (SES) are less sensitive to pain than people from high SES (Summers et al., 2021). Because the war in Syria began 10 years before Ukraine was invaded by Russia and because Syria is a poorer country, individuals might assume Syrians suffer less; and therefore, people want to help less.

Overall, findings were relatively consistent; however, in study 1, the effect of country of origin on helping the individual asylum seeker

was significant, but it was not significant in study 2. In other words, in study 1, people wanted to help the specific individual portrayed in the news article more if she was from Ukraine than Syria, but this did not replicate in study 2. Although no significant difference was found in study 2 as in study 1, examining the results at the group level indicates a similar pattern, although the difference between the averages has narrowed. A possible explanation for this difference in findings could be due to the time differences in the two data collection points: The first study was conducted on March 30, 2022 and the second on May 20, 2022. Because empathizing with individuals who have suffered in the past is more challenging (Hoffman, 2000), people might have felt more empathy toward the Ukrainian refugee in the first study.

Finally, in study 3, we tested the idea of whether financial concerns can be turned into safety concerns if they become so severe that they threaten one's safety. For instance, if an individual cannot find food, they cannot survive. Indeed, we found that people offered more help if an asylum seeker was trying to escape from extreme financial problems. It seems that financial concerns are not perceived as a legitimate reason for migrating unless they threaten one's existence, in which case they may become acceptable in the eye of residents of recipient countries.

## 8.1 | Limitations, future directions, and conclusion

This research has several limitations. First, we measured people's willingness to help rather than their actual help. Actual donations and willingness to donate were found to be highly correlated in one study (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011), although in that study willingness to donate was higher than actual donations. Future studies can improve on the present design by measuring people's actual donation behaviour. A second limitation is that the difference between Syrian and Ukrainian refugees we found in study 1 is likely to be larger than the existing difference. The Russian invasion was still recent (1 or 3 months) on the days we collected data, and the nonreplication of these results in study 2 suggests that this effect might be time-sensitive.

There are a few potential directions for future studies. In the current paper, we included both push (fleeing from danger or poverty) and pull (seeking safety or more money) sentences in the vignettes. It may be worth looking separately at how push and pull factors influence attitudes and behaviour toward asylum seekers, because fleeing poverty or danger and seeking more money or safety can lead to different responses. It is, however, also possible that when someone says that they are seeking safety, someone may assume that they are fleeing from danger. Future research could examine whether push and pull factors produce different responses. Furthermore, in this study, we found that the willingness to help Ukrainian refugees was higher than for Syrian refugees. Future studies could examine the reasons behind this. We mentioned possible reasons (shared group membership, familiarity, habituation fallacy, perceived threat) and other potential mechanisms behind this.

Another possible area for further exploration is that we found an effect of motivation on willingness to help, but did not examine the potential mechanism behind that. Future studies can investigate the possible mediators. For instance, the perceived realistic threat might mediate the effect of perceived motivation of seeking asylum on helping.

Attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers are multifaceted and complex; understanding them is, therefore, a difficult task. In this work, we focused on the motivation of seeking asylum on willingness to help refugees. Overall, our findings suggest that security concerns and extreme financial concerns (threatening one's survival) generated more help for refugees than moderate financial concerns, both for the specific asylum seeker depicted in the vignettes and for specific individual's group as a whole. This finding has several practical implications. Our results showed that when asylum seekers are believed to be motivated by economic improvement, they encounter unwelcoming attitudes. Refugees are often portrayed as bogus refugees who are believed to be looking for financial improvement (Esses et al., 2017; Neumayer, 2005; Onraet et al., 2021). If refugees are constantly portrayed in this way, it will be difficult for them to integrate better into society, and conflict resolution in their destination countries will be more difficult because citizens and policymakers alike will be negatively inclined towards them. Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) found that when immigrants neither identify with their home culture nor the society in which they now reside, they feel marginalized, and when they are exposed to discrimination, they show increased support for radicalization. There are, therefore, many reasons why a hostile environment towards refugees can have a range of undesirable consequences.

Perhaps most importantly, these findings have several important practical implications. First, to encourage more positive attitudes towards refugees, it is important to stress the factors that motivate them that are connected to concerns for their safety rather than a desire for financial betterment. Second, the distinction between financial and safety concerns that is often made when discussing the motivations of refugees is flawed. Many refugees are motivated by a mix of both, and moreover, financial concerns can translate into security concerns at higher levels of severity, rendering the tendency to discuss motivations in dichotomised terms meaningless. An interesting question that could be addressed by future research is whether an intervention that aims at outlining these complexities could be successful at reducing negative attitudes towards refugees. This question was beyond the scope of the present work, but it could be a fruitful next step both in understanding the theoretical factors that drive attitudes towards refugees, and in understanding practical steps that can be undertaken to improve attitudes towards this group.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Emine Bilgen:** Conceptualization; data curation; methodology; investigation; formal analysis; visualization; writing—original draft preparation; writing—review & editing. **Hanna Zagefka:** Writing—review & editing; conceptualization; supervision; methodology. **R. Thora Bjornsdottir:**

Writing—review & editing; methodology; supervision. **Yasemin Abayhan:** Writing—review & editing.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that supports the findings of this study are available in the Supporting Information Material of this article.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The study had another experimental factor in addition to the two factors reported above, 'similarity' of the refugees to British people, in terms of religion. We decided to focus on motivation and country of origin and did not include the similarity factor into studies 2 and 3, therefore, we did not include the result of similarity factor into this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> In Study 1, we measured prejudice only for a specific asylum seeker, not for the whole group. There is no particular reason for this. As we mentioned in the paper, our main focus was on helping, so we kept the other scales for exploratory purposes only. After study 2, we decided that it would be better to measure prejudice also at the group level.
- <sup>3</sup> Because we decided to proceed with explicit measures of prejudice in studies 2 and 3, we report the results for classical prejudice. The results were similar when we analyzed the data with the total score for classical and conditional prejudice. However, the motivation factor was marginally significant ( $p = .08$ ).

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