

Does the opening of a refugee centre impact the support for the extreme right?

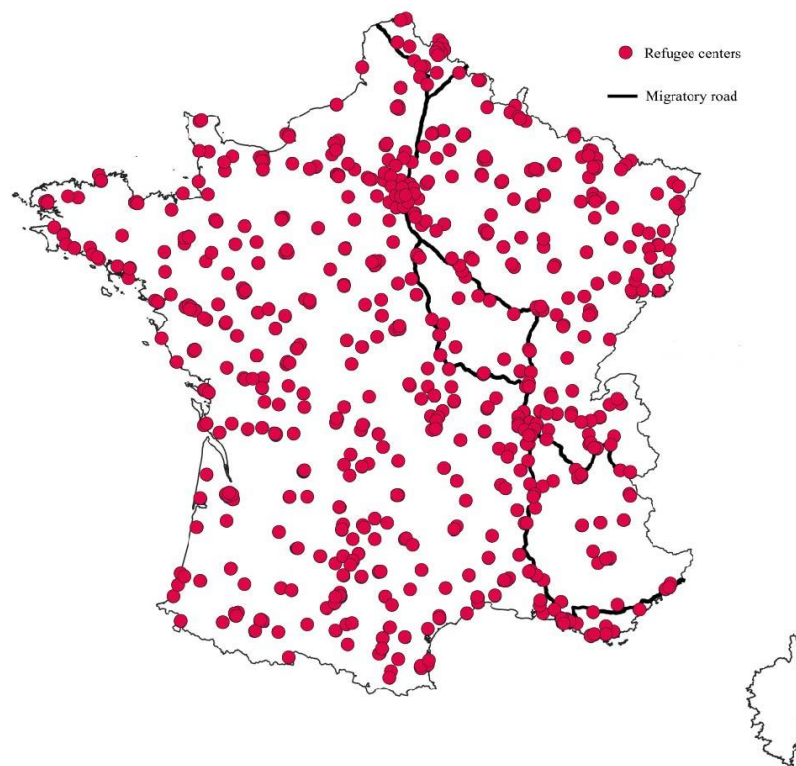
This map shows the sites of refugee centres [1] in metropolitan France in April 2018. From the information used to create this map, we can study the effect of centres opened between 1995 and 2017 on votes for the extreme right in the first round of subsequent presidential elections. The elections studied are those held between 1995 and 2017, analysed in geographical detail, comparing the municipalities that welcomed refugees with those that did not.

The results suggest that the establishment of a centre for refugees reduce by 2% on average the vote for the extreme right in subsequent presidential elections. Before the centres were opened, the extreme right share of the vote followed similar patterns in the “welcoming” and “non-welcoming” municipalities. It dropped significantly in the welcoming municipalities after the opening of the centres, compared with the non-welcoming council areas. This effect is chiefly explained by “the theory of contact” according to which contact with a refugee population reduces prejudices among those who receive them. Nevertheless, some factors tend to mitigate such a decline in the extreme right vote, including:

- The number of refugees welcomed in relation to the size of the local population,
- The cultural differences between the refugee and host populations,
- Media treatment of the events.

Lastly, the opening of refugee centres does not change the electoral preferences of those who already voted for the extreme right. It only changes the views of those who had not voted for the extreme right before but were likely to in the next elections.

[1] The term refugee here includes those who have requested asylum, are beneficiaries of a secondary protection, or have been granted refugee status.



Title: Centres for refugees in metropolitan France in April 2018.
Sources: Ministry of the Interior for the centres, and the OMI for the migration routes.

