



## Immigrant Security in a Culturally Different Environment. The Polish Experience after the Arab Spring<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

Since the decolonisation of Africa - especially after 1960 - more and more people have been arriving from the African continent to Europe for settlement purposes. In 2017, the countries of the European Union there were already 9.1 million African nationals living in the European Union. Of this group, 5 million people came from North Africa (most from Morocco) and the rest from Africa south of the Sahara.

Poland is one of the countries in the European Union that has received many migrants from different parts of the world. Figures indicate that 2.1 million foreigners, mostly from Africa and Asia, will live in Poland in 2020. The possibility of frequent contact with immigrants has increased. Meeting a person of African origin in their place of residence is now declared by 39% of respondents, while in 2015 it was only 13%.

The attitude of Poles towards immigrants from Africa has also changed in recent years. Poles have become accustomed to the everyday presence of foreigners, as indicated by a clear increase in their level of acceptance in their immediate environment. An African as a close neighbour is now accepted by 84% of Poles (up from 61%) and as their son or daughter-in-law by 58% (up from 34%).

There is also a growing concern for keeping immigrants safe, especially when it comes to situations where their life or health may be at risk. However, difficulties arise due to differences in culture, religion, customs and the lack of a common language.

The paper will discuss and clarify these problems.

### Keywords:

Arab Spring, challenges, immigrants, security services, threats

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## 1. Introduction

Since the decolonisation of Africa - especially after 1960 - more and more people have been arriving from the African continent to Europe for settlement purposes. In 2017, the countries of the European Union there were already 9.1 million African nationals living in the European Union. Of this group, 5 million people came from North Africa (most from Morocco) and the rest from Africa south of the Sahara. There are different reasons for migrating to Europe: looking for work, getting an education, creating families. The latter was the main reason for legalising a presence in Europe for Africans.

From a European perspective, the last significant wave of migration in 2011, initiated by the Arab Spring, caused significant impacts on the European population. Data from the International Organisation for Migration, shows that more than 390,000 people moved to the European continent in 2016. Data also shows that in 2017 there were more than 180,000 irregular migrants and by November 2018, almost 130,000 had arrived, with more than 106,000 by sea and the rest by land (IOM 2019) (Skrabacz, 2020).

The increase in irregular immigration is the result of policy tightening of the EU. European countries are increasingly less likely to grant Africans (and not only) residence permits before entry. Meanwhile, as a result of destabilization in the Sahel region, climate change, armed conflicts and other threats, new migration routes to Europe have been created, and thus the number of migrants has increased. More and more people also have the financial and logistical opportunity to move from African countries to Europe to fulfill their aspirations in life.

Poland is one of the European Union countries that has received many immigrants from different parts of the world. The data shows that in 2020, 2.1 million foreigners from all over the world, including Africa, lived in Poland. The possibility of frequent contacts with immigrants has increased. Today, 39% of respondents declare meeting a person of African descent in their place of residence, in 2015 it was only 13%.

There is also growing concern in the host countries about ensuring the safety of immigrants. This is especially true of situations where their life or health may be directly or indirectly threatened. However, there are difficulties arising from cultural and religious differences, different customs and the lack of a common language. Therefore, the aim of the article is: firstly, to present the changes in the migration policy of the European Union that we have observed in the last decade, secondly, to indicate migration movements in Africa itself, especially in its northern and western parts, thirdly, to determine the changes that can be diagnosed in Polish society in perception of immigrants from Africa over the last few decades.

The main research problem for which the authors are looking for an answer was posed as follows: What changes have occurred in the migration policy of the European Union in the last decade and have they contributed to the increase in migration flows



from African countries? What factors attract African immigrants to Poland and how has the attitude of Polish society towards them changed in recent years?

To solve the research problem, a holistic approach was used, through the prism of EU policy and solutions adopted by the European Commission. In addition, the perspective of Poland as a culturally different country with an increasing number of immigrants has been adopted for detailed analyses. This implies changes in the perception of immigrants in the receiving society.

Among the research methods used to solve the research problem, an analysis and synthesis of the literature on the subject was used, especially reports of the International Organization for Migration and the European Union, as well as data obtained from reports of Polish research centers on migration. Then, using deduction and induction, trends in the environment of immigrants who chose Poland as the country of destination were indicated. It also identified the challenges faced by incoming and host communities in the migration process. The article ends with conclusions containing the most important conclusions resulting from the conducted research process.

### ***1.1. Cooperation between the European Union and North African Countries in Tackling Illegal Immigration***

Recent years have seen significant progress in addressing irregular arrivals, human trafficking and smuggling networks in Europe. However, irregular flows continue to put migrants at risk and present the European Union with serious migration challenges (European Commission, 2022).

The EU and its African partners have inaugurated two initiatives on migration routes in the Atlantic and Western and Central Mediterranean. These actions aim to bring together the joint efforts of Member States and the EU to address migration threats. The main concern is the increase in illegal flows and abuse by smuggling networks developed in some African countries.

Migrants and asylum seekers use the Central Mediterranean route to enter the EU in an irregular manner. They embark on the long and dangerous journey from North Africa and Turkey across the Mediterranean to Italy (and much less frequently to Malta). The vast majority of migrants on their way to Europe pass through Libya. This encourages the emergence of persistent and resilient smuggling and trafficking networks in the country. In February 2017, EU leaders agreed new measures to curb irregular migration via the Central Mediterranean route. In November 2017, the EU established a joint task force on migration with the African Union and the UN. The group was meant to combine efforts and enhance cooperation in response to migration challenges in Africa and especially in Libya (Gatta, 2019).

Thus, large-scale voluntary humanitarian return programmes and evacuation operations could be launched. In June 2018, EU leaders called for further measures to reduce irregular migration on the Central Mediterranean route. It was decided to step up efforts to end the activities of smugglers operating from Libyan territory or elsewhere; to continue to support Italy and other EU frontline states; to give more support to the Libyan coast guard, humanitarian reception conditions for migrants and the voluntary return of those stranded in Libya to their own countries; to enhance cooperation with other countries of origin and transit and cooperation on resettlement (Campiglio and Ricci, 2022, pp. 320-322).

In July 2019 the EU approved 5 new migration programmes in North Africa worth a total of €61.5 million. The projects are designed to provide protection and assistance to refugees and vulnerable migrants, improve living conditions and strengthen the social resilience of Libyans, and promote migration and labour mobility (IOM, 2019).

The programmes were adopted under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The fund was established in November 2015 to address the root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration and to help better manage it. The overall budget of the fund is more than €5 billion.

In July 2022 the European Commission launched the first anti-smuggling operational partnerships with Morocco and Niger for the period 2021-2025. Also, the first joint operations were launched between Frontex and Senegal and Mauritania. They aim to support border management, combat migrant smuggling and reduce irregular migration along the Atlantic route. There is also a working arrangement between Frontex and Niger in the field of common security and defence policy.

In November 2022, given the significant increase in migratory pressure on the Central Mediterranean route, the European Commission presented an EU Action Plan for the Central Mediterranean. The plan proposes 20 measures to reduce irregular and unsafe migration, address emerging search and rescue issues and increase solidarity, while spreading responsibility among Member States. The EU has launched major projects to support voluntary return and reintegration in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to this, a joint EU-IMO initiative for the protection and reintegration of migrants continues to provide assistance to migrants in distress in African countries.

In December 2022 the EU and African partners inaugurated the Team Europe initiatives, which focus, among others, on the Central Mediterranean route, and are intended to support the joint efforts of Member States and the EU to address migration challenges. Team Europe initiatives will support partner countries in providing protection, resilience and self-reliance, including life-saving assistance, to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Activities are being carried out in two areas. The first relates to the central Mediterranean, bringing together the European Commission and the European External Action Service with Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic,



Denmark, France, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, and - on the African side - Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Niger, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria. To date, the EU, its member states and Switzerland have agreed to mobilise €1.13 billion to work with African partners on the five pillars of the initiative. The second area concerns the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean route, which will be handled by the European Commission and the European External Action Service together with Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. So far, €908 million has been mobilised for cooperation with Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger and Nigeria (European Commission, 2022).

## ***2. Diagnosis of Migration Movements in North and West Africa***

We can assess the scale of migratory movements of African nationals to Europe using data from the European Statistical Office (Eurostat). Between 2008 and 2019, on average, several hundred thousand Africans migrated towards the European Union each year. Of course, these movements do not just take place between continents, but also occur between and within countries.

West and North Africa together comprise 10.4 million migrants and 21.8 million emigrants, representing 1.6 per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively of the 633.2 million population. These are 2019 estimates from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (UN/DESA, 2019).

This overall level of international migration is relatively low (inward) or moderate (outward) compared to the global ratio of migrants to population estimated at 3.5 per cent. However, important differences can be identified between the two regions and between countries in each region. In North Africa, the three central Maghreb countries - Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia - are mostly senders of migrants. Their migrants, representing between 4.5 and 8.6 per cent of their populations, are mainly directed to Europe (JRC, 2019).

In contrast, few migrants come to their territory from West Africa as long-term settlers. Libya shows the opposite pattern. Despite political chaos and civil war, it remains a destination for hundreds of thousands of locally employed migrants. Its citizens still have a low propensity to migrate abroad, despite intensive internal displacement.

West African countries are both countries of origin and destination for mainly intra-regional and often temporary migration. Returning nationals account for a high percentage of internal migration each year and most countries have a low migration balance. Burkina Faso and Mali emerge as key emigration countries and Côte d'Ivoire

as a major destination country. Since independence (1960), Côte d'Ivoire has continuously been a magnet for migrants from across the West African region and beyond, with the exception of the years of political and social turmoil in the early 2000s. (IOM, 2020).

The migratory movements described are relatively dynamic, existing both within countries and beyond their borders. If we examine the reasons why people move, the main motives are to seek work, opportunities and livelihoods; to escape conflict, persecution, violence and human rights violations; to escape environmental degradation and/or food and water insecurity; and to join family members. Regardless of destination or reason for departure, migrants often share the same destinations (IOM, 2019).

When analysing the type and numerical scale of migration, it can be divided into two categories: legal and irregular. Within the former, a total of 56% of African arrivals in the EU-28 between 2008 and 2019 held a residence permit (visa) when they crossed the community border. They mostly came from Africa south of the Sahara (sub-Saharan). In the same years, as many as 87% of Africans, also from sub-Saharan Africa, attempted to cross the EU border illegally (Giménez-Gómez, Walle and Zergawu, 2019).

A sharp increase in migratory movements was particularly observed between 2014 and 2016, when many Africans without residence permits in Europe took advantage of the increased opportunity to cross the Mediterranean illegally into the European continent. Such a situation was linked to the crisis that began at that time, during which more than one million migrants from conflict-ridden South West Asian countries (mainly from Syria and Afghanistan) arrived in Europe (IOM, 2016).

The destination of irregular migrants was most often Italy, including the island of Lampedusa, Sicily and the Calabrian Peninsula. There, migrants flowed in most often from Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. The second country was Spain, especially the Canary Islands and the Spanish enclaves on the African continent: Ceuta and Melilla. There, the largest number of immigrants was from nearby Morocco and Algeria. When arriving in Europe, migrants treated these countries as destinations, or as transit countries, moving on to other countries, including Poland (IOM, 2019).

### ***3. Africans in Poland - A Case Study***

Analysing data on migration movements in Poland at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, one can conclude that Poland was until relatively recently a country with a strong emigration rather than immigration trend. Data from the Central Statistical Office shows that from 1966 to 2016, emigration movements in Poland outnumbered immigration movements. This trend has changed since 2016 and remains at a comparable level, as shown in the table (Central Statistical Office, 2023).

**Table. Migration flows to/from Poland between 1966 and 2022 (permanent migration):**

Year	Emigration	Immigration	Migration Balance
1966	28843	2228	- 26615
2014	28080	12330	- 15750
2015	No data	No data	No data
2016	11970	13475	1505
2022	13633	15572	1939

Own elaboration based on CSO data.

The visible upward trend of immigration movements indicates that the second decade of the 21st century saw a change in migration flows in Poland, from emigration to immigration, as evidenced by the positive migration balance starting in 2016. Thus, the inflow of foreigners to Poland is systematically increasing, and the territory of the Republic of Poland is increasingly perceived as a destination and not just a transit country.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the data on the origin of people arriving in Poland. In general, between 1973 and 2022, 281,425 people came from Europe, 19,690 from Asia, a total of 55,857 from North and South America, 5,760 from Africa and 5,084 from Oceania (Central Statistical Office, 2023).

On the basis of a detailed analysis of the inflow of people from Africa, it can be indicated that the migration movement towards Poland began to gain momentum at the beginning of the 1990s (1990 - 87 persons; 1991 - 163 persons) and has continued at a similar level until the present (2021 - 131 persons; 2022 - 163 persons) (Central Statistical Office, 2023).

As researchers of migration processes note, the figures presented are for the whole of Africa, and therefore also for inflows from Arab territories to the north of the continent. The values for sub-Saharan Africa or so-called Black Africa are much lower. Only around 2,300 immigrants living in Poland come from this region. Thus, immigrants from the African continent as a whole account for less than 4.5 per cent and immigrants from so-called Black Africa for only 2 per cent of all foreigners living in Poland. The actual number of newcomers from the sub-Saharan African region is unknown and can only be the subject of estimates. The main country of origin of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa is Nigeria, whose citizens account for more than one third of all

immigrants from the region, followed by Cameroon, then Kenya and Angola (Danecka and Jaroszewska, 2013).

In terms of place of residence in Poland, Mazowsze dominates, followed by provinces such as Łódzkie, Małopolskie, Wielkopolskie and Dolnośląskie. Africans, like groups of other immigrants, prefer large urban agglomerations, with the highest concentration in Warsaw and in Łódź, Kraków, Poznań, Wrocław and the Tri-City. (Danecka and Jaroszewska, 2013).

Turning to the push-pull factors of immigrants to Poland, it is worth devoting more attention to this issue. From the qualitative (interview technique) and quantitative (survey technique) research conducted in 2022 by the 'Afryka Inaczej' Foundation entitled 'Africa in a different way.' *Afryka po polsku*, shows that among the factors attracting people to Poland, respondents most often mentioned: geographical advantages (landscapes, lots of greenery, diversity); economic factors; infrastructure development in recent years; economic development; living cheaper than in Western countries; safety, peace, lack of wars; Polish cuisine; national characteristics of Poles (hospitality, friendliness) (Ohia-Nowak and Duński, 2022).

Of course, in addition to the positive sides, negative factors that are perceived by Africans were also mentioned by the respondents. The following were mentioned: weather conditions (gloomy autumn and long winter); the political scene (division and polarisation of society by politicians, aggressive language of political debate, lack of State/Church separation); ignorance and closure to other cultures (lack of knowledge about other cultures, pervasive stereotypes about people of other origins, open and latent racism) (Ohia-Nowak and Duński, 2022).

In the analysis of the reasons for the low inflow of immigrants to Poland from the sub-Saharan African region, many scholars further point to the following barriers: relational - poor attitude of the Polish society; cultural - large cultural differences; communicational - poor (or lack of) language skills, differences in the sphere of non-verbal communication; climatic; untraveled paths - lack of tradition of migration to the country and an extensive migration network (Danecka and Jaroszewska, 2013).

What advantages and disadvantages do Africans believe Poles themselves possess? Among the most frequently mentioned advantages of Poles were: hospitality, kindness, helping others; openness and tolerance (especially among the younger generation); strong family ties; attachment to tradition; sense of humour; ability to unite in times of need.

Among the disadvantages mentioned were: complaining about everything, not being able to appreciate what is; being easy to judge and judge others; focusing on the past, martyrdom, putting oneself in the role of victims; fear of otherness resulting from complexes (Ohia-Nowak and Duński, 2022).





It is worth noting that the presented assessment of Poles is in line with the opinions of other nationalities, and also largely coincides with Poles' views of themselves.

#### ***4. Poles towards Immigrants from Africa - An Analysis of Attitudes and Behaviour***

The image of immigrants of African origin is created in Poland, as in many other European countries, by a number of factors. Among the most important, it is worth mentioning, on the one hand, the understanding, sympathy and willingness to help expressed especially during the Arab Spring, and on the other hand, the growing fear in European societies of the terrorist threat, exacerbated, among other things, by the series of attacks in Paris in 2015. (Almasy, Meilhan and Bittermann, 2015).

This trend did not bypass Poland either, although the views presented among Poles on refugees were not based on practical experience in this area, but only on media messages and stereotypes functioning in society (Omyła-Rudzka, 2016).

Subsequent events in the world and in the close vicinity of Poland, such as the covid-19 pandemic, Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, or the conflict on the Polish-Belarusian border contributed to a gradual change in the image of immigrants and refugees, and Poles themselves have shown a dramatic change in their views and behaviour in this area (Zieliński, 2021).

If we make comparative analyses of the attitudes of Poles towards immigrants, including those of African origin, over a certain period of time, it is possible to formulate certain regularities and trends indicating a change in views in the discussed area.

Research reports on the perception of foreigners coming to Poland generally indicate a positive attitude of Poles towards immigrants and refugees. A study conducted in 2014 showed that Poles declared more sympathy than antipathy towards immigrants (70 per cent versus 30 per cent on a scale of 1 to 10) (Kostrzyński, 2014).

In addition, 61 per cent of respondents did not mind if a person of a different race was their neighbour / superior / relative (14 per cent of respondents would not agree). 46% agreed with the position that refugees in Poland should have the same opportunities for development as Poles (23% were of the opposite opinion) (Kostrzyński, 2014).

Almost half of the respondents believed that accepting refugees is beneficial for society, as they can enrich cultural life in Poland and contribute to the labour market. Importantly, more than a quarter of respondents declared that they could personally get involved in helping refugees without any reservations. 55% had no opinion on the matter, and 8% did not intend to help at all. The most frequently declared type of

support was to help a refugee get along in a shop or in an office (i.e. help that does not require a lengthy and energy-intensive effort). The least frequently declared support was help in finding a job (Kostrzynski, 2014).

The distribution of responses was very similar in the 2015 survey. Almost 54% of respondents asked whether Poland should accept refugees from areas of armed conflict gave a positive answer. A year later, this figure dropped to 40% (Bieńkowski and Świdorska, 2017).

However, if this relatively positive picture is juxtaposed with data from the Prokuratura Krajowa (National Public Prosecutor's Office) on hate crimes, a worrying decline in the positive attitude of Poles towards foreigners was unfortunately evident. The data shows that the scale of crimes in this category has been increasing continuously since 2000. At the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, there was a significant increase (from 165 cases in 2015 to 263 in 2016). These were offences under Article 119 § 1 of the Penal Code, consisting of beating or using threats based on ethnic or religious affiliation. At the same time, among all registered cases of hate crimes, there was a significant increase in the number of acts against people of Islam (29% of cases in the first six months of 2016) (Prokuratura Krajowa, 2016).

The occurrence of a certain level of prejudice and negative attitudes is explained by researchers of migration movements in Poland by four basic factors. Firstly, religious difference, specifically Islam, to which many Poles attribute attitudes of hatred towards 'infidels.' Secondly, the threat of terrorism and the decline in the sense of security, especially common in those countries where immigrants have arrived in large numbers (France, Germany, the United Kingdom). Thirdly, cultural threats, arising from different culture, traditions, beliefs and language. Fourth, threats in the area of social security, including the impact on the labour market, the burden on the state budget due to extensive social benefits and the increase in unemployment benefits (Danecka and Jaroszevska, 2013).

It is also worth adding that many of the presented views of Poles on refugees resulted not from personal experiences, but from the image of refugees created in the media and the subjective interpretation of information and comments heard online (Bieńkowski and Świdorska, 2017).

How has the attitude of Poles towards immigrants changed in recent years, especially post-pandemic years and what factors influenced this? There is no doubt that Poland is gradually becoming a country of immigrants. Although it is not as large as in France or Germany, it is noteworthy that more and more foreigners work in Poland. This is confirmed by the data of the Social Insurance Institution, according to which in May 2023 the number of insured foreigners was 1 million 85 thousand. and increased compared to April 2023 by 8.3 thousand. The largest increase was recorded in the case of citizens of Ukraine - by 3.3 thousand. and Belarus - by 1.9 thousand, and the largest



decrease - citizens of Moldova and Russia - 0.1 thousand each. (Social Insurance Institution, 2023).

The above shows that the contact of Poles with people of foreign origin is constantly increasing. Currently, 39% of respondents declare meeting a person of African descent in their place of residence, in 2015 it was only 13%. People of Asian origin are now seen by 45%, before - 22%. Of course, meetings with Ukrainians are the most common, declared by almost every Pole (92%).

More personal contact translates into greater acceptance as measured by the social distance scale. Today, 84% of Poles accept an African as a close neighbor, and 58% as a member of their family (through marriage with their child). Identical results were obtained for people from Asia. A higher degree of acceptance was declared in the case of Ukrainians (93% and 68%, respectively), and significantly lower for people of Arab origin (68% and 45%). In the group of people who have personal contact with Africans, everyone accepted them as a neighbor, and the vast majority (83%) as a son-in-law or daughter-in-law (Ohia-Nowak and Duński, 2022).

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the obtained data allows us to conclude that ordinary, everyday and direct contacts between immigrants and the host society reduce the level of mutual fear and prejudice. Opinions of Poles built on the basis of personal experience allow to refute the stereotypes that have been functioning for centuries in hermetic communities. Polish society was such a society for many years. In the period after the end of World War II (1945) until the beginning of the 1990s, it was emigrants who left Poland, not immigrants. Political, economic and social changes initiated at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries and Poland's accession to the European Union (2004) contributed to opening the country to newcomers from other countries and continents.

The migration processes described in the article in many cases occur rapidly, often in an uncontrolled manner. This was evident during the Arab Spring. This is also visible after Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine and the massive influx of Ukrainian war refugees in the first quarter of 2023.

However, regardless of the conditions, both for the arriving and receiving communities, such situations pose significant challenges, including threats that may turn into social conflicts and even civil wars. That is why it is so important to take effective and appropriate actions to prevent this, and in the worst case, to mitigate the consequences for both parties.

In order to properly prepare the Polish society for immigrants, it is worth taking appropriate actions in this regard in advance. It is postulated that:

1. Reliably inform citizens about when, who and in what numbers will come to the country. This will allow for the creation of a positive image of immigrants, based on true information.
2. Define the aid package that Poland is ready to provide to people arriving in the country. It is primarily about social security, work, health care and access to education and culture.
3. Properly prepare the services responsible for security. The point is to prepare fire brigade officers, police officers and paramedics to behave skilfully in a situation where life and health of immigrants are at risk. Cultural differences, traditions, language and customs are factors that radically increase the risk of misunderstandings and even conflicts between rescuers and those in need.

As for the actions that should be taken in the community immigrating to Poland, it is advisable to:

1. Give immigrants detailed information about the country they are arriving in. It is about knowledge about the climate, culture and customs of the host society. This will increase the empathy of both parties.
2. Define the rules of residence of immigrants in terms of social and economic security, working conditions and quality, as well as access to education and culture.
3. Familiarize immigrants with the cultural and national specificity of Poles. It is important to respect local traditions and adhere to common law norms. This will not intensify unnecessary conflicts on this background.
4. Relocation of immigrants in Poland. The experience of European countries shows that locating immigrants in large, closed enclaves is not beneficial for either side. The assimilation of immigrants with small local communities will be more efficient when both sides have a chance to get to know each other and gain trust in each other. With fewer immigrants, the assimilation process will be faster and more efficient.
5. Taking special care of children and youth in order to mitigate the effects of staying in a foreign environment. In this group of immigrants, it is worth focusing on learning the Polish language, which will allow overcoming communication barriers in the long run.



## Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

## Notes on Contributor

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