

CURRENT MIGRATION TRENDS IN GERMANY

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1 Introduction

Migration has quickly become a main topic of political and public debates in 2015 due to the steep increase in asylum applications following a long period of decline. However, the current debates and public reactions cannot be understood without a basic knowledge of historic migration patterns. Thus, the report will start with a brief historical overview of migration in Germany before giving a more detailed account of current trends. The report will differentiate periods of migration by the key characteristics of the predominant groups of migrants. Those characteristics comprise the countries of origin as well as different categories of migration. Such categories usually distinguish between the migration motives, i.e. labour, refugee, or family migration. While it is clear that these categories are not mutually exclusive – for example, a refugee can seek employment in the host country at the same time – they will nonetheless be used here. States usually sort migrants into legal categories along those lines and grant certain social, political and economic rights to each of those groups.

2 History of immigration in Germany

2.1 Immigration in general

Mobility has always been a feature of societal development in the German-speaking regions, even if the assumption prevails that Germany had been a country of emigration for centuries prior to the immigration processes witnessed since the second half of the 20th century (cf. Hoerder 2010). For instance, sovereigns have actively recruited farmers in the 16th century, e.g. by providing them with land and granting exemptions from duties for the initial settling periods. Moreover, journeymen from different crafts as well as refugees (usually fleeing from religion-based prosecution) were a common phenomenon of those times. Those groups made up more than 40 percent of the population in Frankfurt around the year 1600 (Hoerder 2010: 46).

The onset of industrialization coincided with the abolition of serfdom and the modernization of agrarian production. These processes further increased internal and international migration. Freed farm workers left the rural areas to work as unskilled labourers in the new urban centres (Hoerder

2010: 55f). Cities expanded rapidly¹ and – despite massive population growth – employment growth exceeded the labour supply by residents of the German Reich. The response was an increasing employment of foreigners in the new industrial centres and the mining regions of the Ruhr, but also in agriculture. While political elites needed the additional labour force, they did not want to permit permanent settlement. Increasing nationalism marked newcomers and even long-time foreign residents as “strangers”. A restrictive regime and strong controls were established to temporarily import labour while preventing permanent immigration (Oltmer 2016: 18-37; Hoerder 2010: 83-85).

Need for industrial and agricultural labour grew further during the First World War. Prisoners of war and forced labour supplemented voluntary working migrants. Moreover, nation building after the war led to the displacement of app. 1 million persons from the areas ceded to other states by the Weimar Republic. Nonetheless, resentment against foreigners prevailed, and protectionism of the German labour market was reinstated after the war, limiting immigration and permanent settlement (Hoerder 2010: 93-97).

The increasing prevalence of National Socialism reinforced those tendencies. The National Socialists drew on prevailing resentment and carried it to extremes, culminating in a blatant racist ideology that downgraded all foreigners and propagated the extinction particularly of Jews, Sinti and Romanies.² The high demand for labourers during the Second World War nonetheless led to renewed forced migration and forced labour of up to 12 million persons. Most of those involuntary migrants were quickly – and in part forcibly³ – repatriated or resettled after the war; others remained even if they were granted only limited rights (Oltmer 2016: 37-48).

Massive immigration of “ethnic” Germans from Eastern Europe (e.g. from former German territory, but also from Eastern European states where many of them had lived for generations) began after the war. Until 1950, 12.5 million people fled to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The massive displacement of ethnic Germans ended in 1950. Even so, German-speaking migrants continued to immigrate into the FRG (Hoerder 2010: 113-115). The so-called “resettlers” (*Aussiedler*) were admitted based on their German descent. They were granted German citizenship and related political rights, which helped with their integration (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 76-83).

¹ For example, the population of Berlin grew from 172,000 inhabitants in 1800 to 2.3 million in 1910. Very often, workers did not migrate permanently, but continuously moved back to their regions of origin or onwards to other regions, depending on the situation of the labour markets (Oltmer 2016: 24-27).

² The Nazi terror regime resulted in an estimated 6 million murdered Jews, hundreds of thousands dead Sinti and Roma, plus the killings of persons deemed “unfit to live” (such as persons with disabilities) or opponents to the regime (cf. Wildt 2012).

³ Forced repatriation, in particular to the USSR, in some cases resulted in death penalties or camp detention of the alleged “collaborators”, resulting in the deaths of many forced migrants.

The German economy recovered quickly since the 1950s, with the financial help of the USA (European Recovery Program or “Marshall Plan”). A renewed need for foreign workers arose. Until the construction of the wall between the two German states, immigration from the GDR to the FRG prevailed. Moreover, the Federal Republic followed up on the pre-war system of bilateral recruitment contracts (*Anwerbeabkommen*) with other states. The federal government concluded new ones, in particular with Italy (1955), Spain and Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Portugal (1964), and Yugoslavia (1968). The goal was to attract foreign workers for temporary employment, especially in non- and semi-skilled jobs. They were supposed to return to their countries of origin later on and were therefore labelled “guest workers” (*Gastarbeiter*). However, when recruitment was stopped in 1973, many workers remained in West Germany and had their families join them or formed new families in Germany. Especially for citizens of the European Economic Community (EEC, later EU), the free movement of persons facilitated migration. Consequently, persons of foreign nationality made up more than 7 percent of the total population in the 1980s (Oltmer 2016: 55-63).

Labour unions and charity organizations underlined the need for integration. Civil society groups and organizations often organized integration, by supporting newcomers with language courses, qualification measures and with finding housing and work. In contrast, public integration measures remained patchy and the FRG denied being a country of immigration for many decades. Only in the late 1990s were the need for immigration and the reality of migration acknowledged. This policy shift in part derived from an increasing visibility of the problems resulting from a lack of integration e.g. in cities, but also in the labour markets or in schools. The “second generation of migrants” (i.e. the children of the former “guest workers”) increasingly joined the German school system which was not well equipped to deal with immigrants. The Federal Government initiated a legal reform and passed an “Immigration Law” (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*) in 2005. The law strengthened federal integration policy – which had formerly been largely left to the municipalities – and reformed German citizenship law (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 261-272).

Labour migration to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was less abundant. “Foreign contract workers” (*ausländische Vertragsarbeitnehmer*) were recruited predominantly from Vietnam and Mozambique, fewer from Cuba and Poland. The GDR applied rotation more rigorously, with workers forcibly repatriated upon termination of their time-limited contracts. The “foreigners” were socially excluded from the East German society and usually lived in separate community dwellings (Hoerder 2010: 110f).

The opening of the Eastern Bloc and the restructurings in the former Soviet Union triggered renewed immigration of ethnic Germans since the end of the 1980s (“late re-settlers”/Spätaussiedler).⁴ Between 1988 and 2015, 3 million people moved to Germany, predominantly from the former Soviet Union (Oltmer 2016: 65f). Their economic, social and cultural integration is often difficult, even if German language requirements have successively been instituted and re-settlers have been granted a privileged position compared to other migrants (cf. Bade and Oltmer 2003).

2.2 Refugee migration in historical perspective

Under the impression of massive refugee migration triggered by the Nazi regime and the expectation of German “refugees” fleeing from the East, a broad right to seek asylum was incorporated in the West German constitution (*Grundgesetz*) in 1949. Refugees were initially received rather openly – especially those from the East, since they were understood as proof of the superiority of the capitalist regime.

However, rising numbers of applications and a shift in the main countries of origin led to a change in the public opinion in the 1980s. Demands to contain immigration and send back “foreigners” to their countries of origin were increasingly voiced. This change also resulted from the obvious difficulties with integration into the education system and the labour market (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 104f). Therefore, the openness of receiving asylum seekers was reversed and accusations of “abuse” of the asylum system were raised (Oltmer 2016: 67-71). Asylum seekers were increasingly labelled “economic refugees” (“*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*”) as it was assumed that most were migrating for economic reasons and not for fear from political persecution. The topics of immigration and asylum were increasingly politicized in the 1980s and early 1990s (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 105-118, 132-143). Escalating violence against migrants and refugees and an ever more aggressive public debate followed. Finally, the German constitution was changed and the right to asylum considerably restricted (cf. Fröhlich 2010; Luft and Schimany 2014). So-called “safe third countries” and “safe countries of origin” were defined with the goal of achieving a quick repatriation of asylum-seekers from those countries. Welfare benefits for asylum seekers were constricted to a minimum for the duration of their application process, border controls were enhanced, and visa requirements imposed (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 169-176). In addition, regulations were established at the European level, shifting the responsibility for receiving refugees to the countries on the EU boundaries (Boswell and Geddes 2011; Bendel 2013).

⁴ Since 1993, their admission is governed by quotas to restrict immigration. Initially, 225,000 persons were admitted per year. This rate was lowered to 100,000 in 2000, but actual immigration rates were much lower in recent years.

Even so, the Federal Republic of Germany adopted rules introduced by the GDR regarding Jewish immigration. The heads of the Federal Government and the 16 state governments introduced the possibility for Jews to obtain permanent residency in Germany in order to support Jewish communities. Jews can submit a request for admission with the German embassy in their host countries. If they can prove Jewish decent, they will be issued permanent resident status and be distributed to the Länder according to a quota system. Between 1991 and 2004, nearly 1.9 million Jews migrated to Germany based on this law, but yearly rates decreased since 1995 (Haug 2005).

After the restrictions of the German and European asylum systems, the number of asylum seekers in Germany declined successively until 2008. While largely maintaining restrictive policies, the public perception of immigration changed slightly: Since 2000, the need for (highly qualified) immigration was increasingly acknowledged. Consequently, the public debate focused increasingly on the labour market potential of refugees, and measures to attract highly skilled labour were introduced at the European level (so-called “Blue Card”). At the same time, the implications of immigration for internal security gained prominence in public debates in the wake of terrorist attacks. The Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*) of 2005 should thus achieve “managed” labour market migrations while keeping unwanted migrants out and preventing “abuse” of the asylum system (Müller 2010: 150-185; Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 251-272).

3 Current migration trends

3.1 Refugee migration

The numbers of asylum seekers rose slowly but steadily between 2008 and 2014. In 2015, the number of immigrants seeking asylum in Germany increased so rapidly that public agencies were unable to register all of them upon arrival. Thus, public statistics list less than 480,000 asylum applications in 2015, even if app. 890,000 refugees have entered Germany.⁶ Due to this backlog, the number of asylum applications has risen further in 2016, while the number of new immigrants has fallen (210,000 new entries until September 2016). Taken together, the number of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016 has increased steeply compared to former years. Even so, it must be seen in connection with the long decline in refugee migration from 1994 to 2008.

⁵ Prior to the passing of the Immigration Law, a scheme for attracting highly skilled workers (“Green Card”) had been introduced in 2000. The scheme was terminated in 2004 and had resulted in the immigration of less than 15,000 experts (Kolb 2005).

⁶ Press release of the Federal Ministry of the Interior of 30 Sept. 2016, available at <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2016/09/asylsuchende-2015.html> (last accessed 28 Nov. 2016).

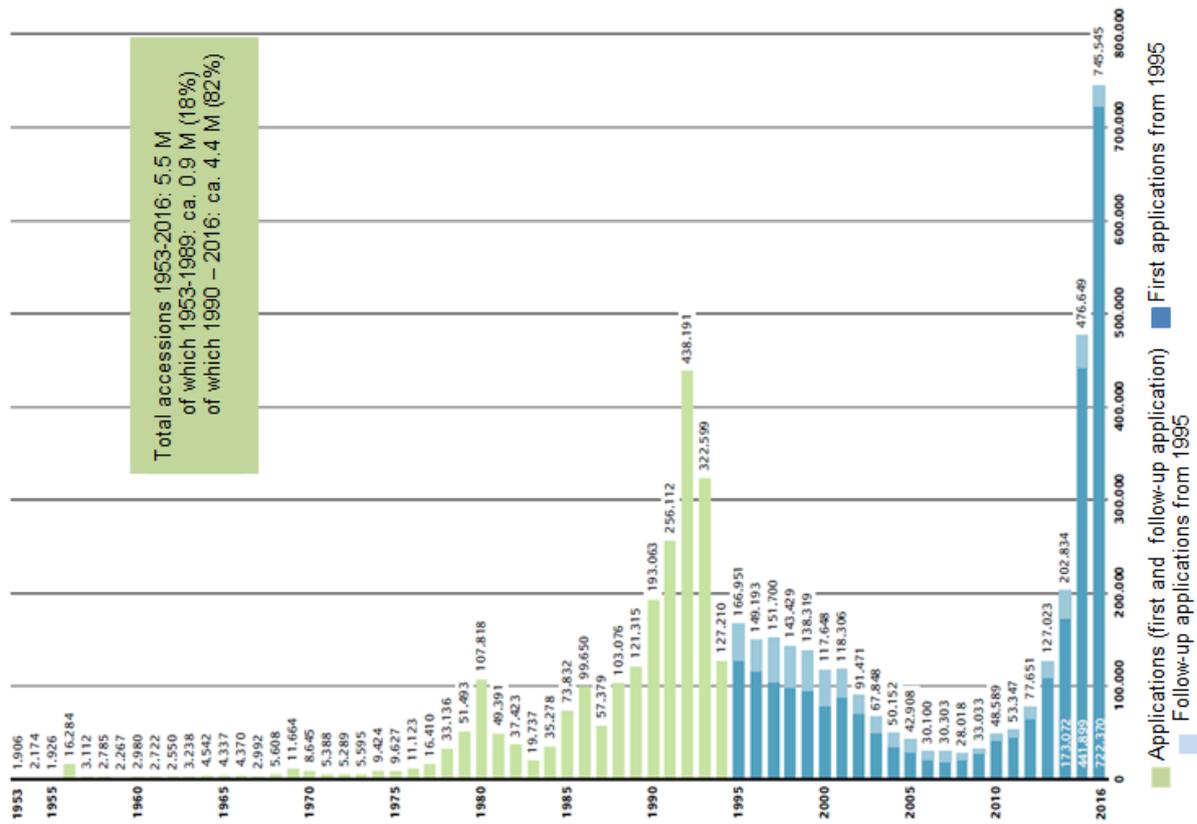


Figure 1: Number of asylum applications in Germany, 1953-2016

Source: BAMF 2016b, p. 3.

In 2016, most asylum seekers came from Syria (36.9 percent of all applications), Afghanistan (17.6 percent) and Iraq (13.3 percent). In contrast, the number of asylum applications from Kosovo and Serbia has decreased sharply compared to 2015, when they were among the top ten countries of origin. In a longer-term perspective across the last five years, applications from African countries such as Somalia and Eritrea have also been among the highest, albeit at much lower total numbers (BAMF 2016a: 18-20).

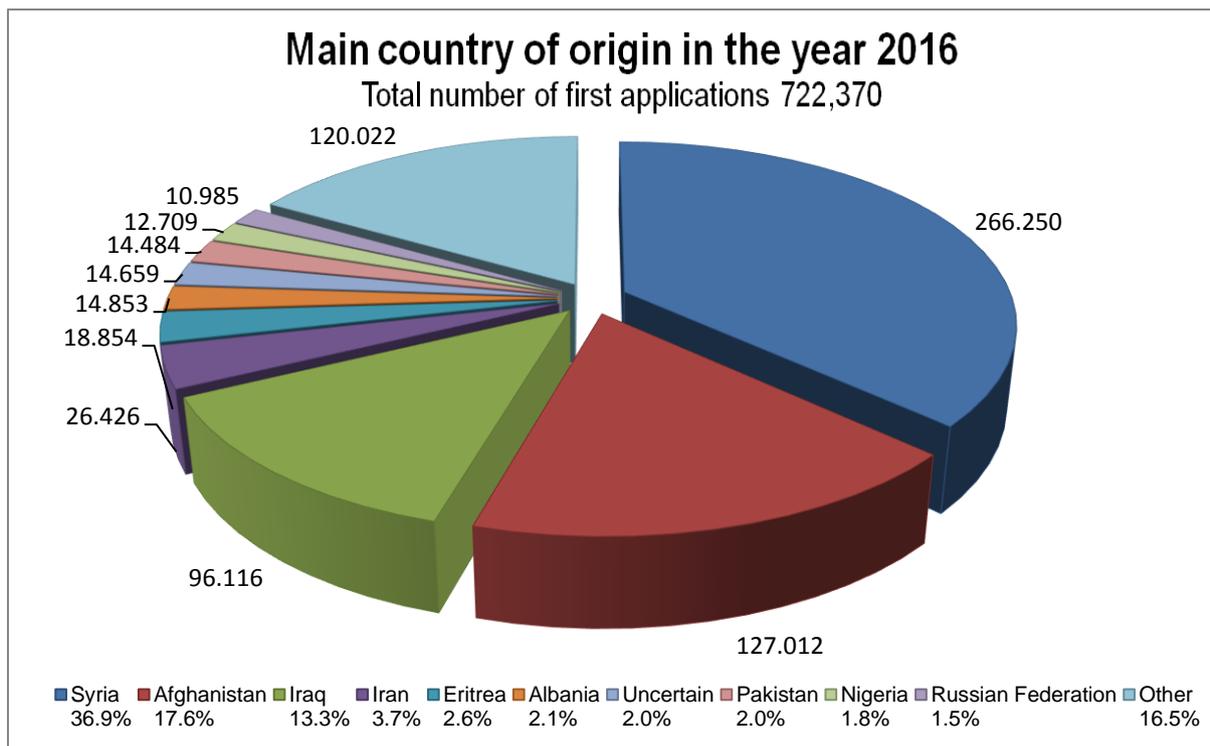


Figure 2: Main countries of origin of asylum-seekers in 2016

Source: BAMF 2016b, p. 8.

Most asylum seekers in Germany are young, with 74 percent of those applying for asylum in 2016 being below 30 years of age, and more than one third of all applicants below 18 years. The majority of applicants are male, even if the rate of 66 percent is not as high as in previous years (BAMF 2016b: 7).

Asylum seekers who arrive in Germany are distributed to the Länder according to a quota system. It is based on total resident population and tax revenue. In 2016, Hesse is required to receive 7.4 percent of all applications, whereas Berlin receives 5 percent. Usually, asylum seekers are at first housed in shared accommodations managed by the Länder for a period of up to six months. Afterwards, if the application has not been fully processed, asylum seekers are distributed by territorial states (such as Hesse) to the municipalities. Usually, the distribution is based on the population of the districts. In city-states such as Berlin, the state itself remains responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers throughout their application (Müller 2013).

An increase in positive decisions accompanies the increase in the number of applications, meaning that a larger number of those who arrive in Germany are entitled to stay. In 2016, 62 percent of all decisions were positive, compared to 27 percent in 2007 (BAMF 2016b: 11). Positive decisions comprise the recognition as having a right of asylum according to the German constitution,

recognition as refugee according to the Geneva Convention, the granting of temporary protection according to European law, and the recognition of impediments to deportation.⁷ All of these legal categories entail particular rights. Refugees recognized under the Geneva Convention and the German constitution hold the broadest rights. However, all categories imply that the asylum seeker is entitled to remain in Germany. The initial right to remain covers a period of one to three years and is subject to renewal if the reasons for seeking asylum persist.⁸ Recognized refugees obtain full legal access to the labour market⁹ and the educational system as well as to the social security systems.

3.2 Other forms of migration

While refugee migration has clearly dominated public discourse throughout the years 2015 and 2016, this does not mean that other forms of migration were insignificant during that time. For 2015, a total in-migration of 1,810,904 persons of foreign nationality was reported. Subtracting out-migration of foreigners, this leaves a surplus of 1,242,265 incoming migrants. The surplus is particularly high for immigrants from Asia (especially from the main countries of origin of refugees), but also from EU countries¹⁰ such as Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia and Italy; and non-EU countries such as Albania. Differentiated by category or motive of migration, the largest group was humanitarian migration, including asylum seekers. The next highest were family migration (more than 82,000 people), academic studies (more than 50,000 people), and employment (just below 39,000 people) (BAMF 2016a: 73-82).

In total, 16.4 million people with a migration background lived in Germany in 2014, making up 20 percent of the total population. This number comprises 7.2 million persons of foreign nationality¹¹ and 9.2 million Germans who were foreign-born or whose parents were non-Germans. The majority of persons with a migration background stems either from former “guest workers” or from ethnic

⁷ All of these legal forms will be referred to as “refugees” in this report unless otherwise specified.

⁸ These renewals are usually granted (BAMF 2016a: 62f). Refugees can also obtain a long-term residency status after five years of residence.

⁹ If only impediments to deportation are acknowledged, the Aliens Authority decides on a case-by-case basis if access to the labour market is granted (<http://www.bamf.de/DE/Infothek/FragenAntworten/ZugangArbeitFluechtlinge/zugang-arbeit-fluechtlinge-node.html>, last accessed 16 Jan. 2017). However, this regulation affected only 3.5 percent of all asylum decisions in 2016 (BAMF 2016b: 11).

¹⁰ Migration from EU countries is treated differently in Germany than that from non-EU countries. EU citizenship confers migrants with nearly the same rights as German nationals, enabling them to participate fully in all societal systems such as the labour market and education. Even so, there are certain additional criteria regulating access to the welfare systems, which have been tightened by federal law in late 2016 (cf. <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-10/sozialleistungen-andrea-nahles-eu-buerger-auslaender>, last accessed 29 Mar. 2017).

¹¹ Germany has a comparatively large share of non-nationals. Part of it is attributable to rather restrictive citizenship and naturalization laws, such as the ban on dual citizenship (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 266f).

Germans who resettled to Germany. On average, their educational attainment and labour market participation are lower than that of the German population. This is particularly the case for persons of foreign nationality, who are also incurring higher risks of living in poverty (bpb 2016: 218-235).

4 Tasks and problems resulting from current migration trends: Political and public debates

In 2015, the most pressing needs of asylum seekers were at the forefront of public debates at all levels of government: How to prevent homelessness among asylum seekers, how to secure food and clothing, etc. Now that the number of new arrivals has declined, the key topics are integration and internal security.

The debate at the national level of policy-making currently focuses on the question if the German society is capable of absorbing a high number of newcomers. The wish to restrict new immigration and repatriate rejected asylum seekers as quickly as possible has resulted in a division of asylum seekers into two groups. On the one side, there are those asylum seekers who are deemed genuinely in need of protection and whose integration shall be supported at an early stage. This group predominantly comprises refugees from groups with high rates of approval such as Syria or Iraq. On the other side, there are those whose claims are understood to be unsubstantiated or even fraudulent and who should be quickly repatriated. They include asylum seekers from so-called “safe third countries” – by law defined as comprising e.g. Macedonia, Serbia, and Senegal – and other countries such as the North African countries. The objective of their repatriation has gained prominence after an asylum seeker from Tunisia allegedly ran a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin.¹² This attack has also reinforced the public debate that links internal security and refugee migration. Politicians have made different proposals to increase security, including a closer surveillance and even preventative incarceration of potential terrorists.¹³

The debate on quick repatriation overlooks the fact that even rejected asylum seekers are often staying in Germany for several years or even indefinitely. The government has even created a right of abode for those persons who have lived in Germany for more than eight years despite a lacking legal residence status. The right to abode is granted to persons if they have e.g. learned the German

¹² The alleged attacker had entered Germany as an asylum seeker and had used multiple identities when registering with the German authorities. See: Zeit online: „Wie ein Mensch zum Terroristen wird“, 29 Dec. 2016, available at <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2016-12/anis-amri-herkunft-hintergrund-mutmasslicher-attentaeter-berlin-anschlag/seite-2> (last accessed 09 Jan. 2017); Zeit online: „Attentäter von Berlin benutzte 14 Identitäten.“, 05 Jan. 2017, available at <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-01/anis-amri-ralf-jeager-berlin-anschlag> (last accessed 09 Jan. 2017).

¹³ Spiegel online: „Hektische Sicherheitsdebatte. Das große Ab- und Zuschieben“, 09 Jan. 2017, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/innere-sicherheit-anti-terror-debatte-loest-verfruehten-bundestagswahlkampf-aus-a-1129075.html> (last accessed 09 Jan. 2017).

language and found employment (cf. Bundesministerium des Innern 2015). Even so, the policy fields of internal security and migration management prevail at the national level. In order to further restrict immigration, foreign policy is also connected to refugee migration, e.g. by concluding agreements or contracts with other states. Those agreements aim at enhancing border protection by countries of emigration or transit in exchange for financial support or visa liberalizations. Legally, those arrangements refer to “irregular migration”, but due to the nature of mixed migration flows, the probability that enhanced border controls will also prevent the immigration of asylum seekers is high.¹⁴

At the same time, those who arrive in Germany and are entitled to stay – or having a “positive prospect” of remaining permanently, such as Syrian asylum seekers before their formal recognition as refugees – shall be integrated into the German society. Integration had dominated the public debate before the onset of the current surge in numbers. Even so, no consensus on how to define the term “integration” exists. Most controversial is the cultural aspect of integration: The CDU had spurred this debate in 2000 by putting forward the notion of a German “guiding culture” (“*Leitkultur*”) that migrants should adopt (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou 2009: 231-237). Others refuse such a cultural aspect of integration and argue for a pluralist society. Less controversial are the educational and labour market aspects of integration. Most politicians and elites agree that the participation of migrants and refugees in these systems is desirable.

Since 2013, federal legislative reforms had aimed at improving the access of asylum seekers to the labour market and to education already during their application procedure. For example, the waiting times before asylum seekers were allowed to take up employment had been reduced. The access of young refugees to vocational training has also been facilitated (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015: 6f). When public debate reinforced the division into “legitimate” and “illegitimate” asylum seekers as outlined above, some of these liberalizations were restricted to those who are considered genuinely in need of protection. For example, only asylum seekers from certain countries of origin are allowed to participate in federally funded language and integration courses already during their application procedure. In contrast, asylum seekers from “safe third countries” face a number of restrictions.

There are no reliable statistics of the educational attainment and language proficiency of refugees, and thus no precise information on the need for integration support exists. However, a voluntary and non-representative assessment of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF) indicates that the occupational qualifications and educational attainment of asylum seekers and refugees is lower on average than that of the autochthone

¹⁴ Cf. <http://www.unhcr.org/mixed-migration-europe.html> (last accessed 09 Feb. 2017).

population, and even lower than that of other immigrant groups (Brücker et al. 2015). Similarly, German and English language skills are estimated to be rather low among newcomers.¹⁵ Thus, the need for public support to achieve the refugees' integration is obvious.

Cities and states carry the largest part of those integration tasks, as many of the related policy fields are within their autonomy. They have demanded additional federal means to cope with the additional tasks resulting from increasing immigration. It resulted in a law to support the Länder and municipalities financially after many political struggles on competences and funding.¹⁶ Despite increased funding, the states and municipalities face a number of issues. For example, a lack of qualified teachers prevents the quick expansion of German language courses. It also limits the capacities of German schools to integrate refugee children adequately. Some regional school ministries have called for retired teachers to return to school in order to support their former colleagues. In addition, financial support is granted to civil society groups and networks that support refugees by qualification measures or job application trainings (cf. Blaschke et al. 2015). Another challenge will be to ensure housing of asylum seekers after their recognition. Many German cities are already struggling with quickly rising house prices and rents. They will need to find solutions to construct new affordable housing and prevent competition among different low-income groups (cf. Altrock and Kunze 2016).

In sum, the current refugee migration together with former migration movements creates various challenges for the German society. They become particularly manifest at the local level. Here, different population groups come into contact, e.g. when German and foreign children visit the same schools or when refugees become the neighbours of long-standing inhabitants. Moreover, many of the tasks resulting from refugee migration are in the responsibility of the municipalities and the *Länder*: Active labour market policies, childcare, health care and housing policy are crucially shaped at the local and regional levels. Therefore, different models of local integration exist, depending on the local context and local governance modes. Those policies and models will be analysed in work packages 4 and 5 of this project.

¹⁵ Educational levels and language skills are likely to differ between refugee groups. However, it is not possible to obtain any viable information on this. Moreover, reports and accounts of experts indicate that language skills will not suffice to achieve a quick integration into the labour market (cf. <https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article146124293/Die-grosse-Huerde-fuer-Fluechtlinge-bei-der-Jobsuche.html>, last accessed 09 Jan. 2017).

¹⁶ Gesetz zur Beteiligung des Bundes an den Kosten der Integration und zur weiteren Entlastung von Ländern und Kommunen, passed in December 2016. See http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Gesetzestexte/Gesetze_Verordnungen/2016-12-06-G-z-Beteiligung-d-Bundes-an-d-Kosten-d-Integration.html (last accessed 08 Feb. 2017).

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