

Coping with the Challenges of Mass Migration: Reception, Distribution and Integration of Refugees in German Municipalities since 2015

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During 2015 Germany received over two million migrants and refugees, more than ever before in its history. This mass migration challenges Germany in many ways, especially with respect to the long-term integration process of refugees. While widely debated on the federal level, management of the integration process mostly occurs on the

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local level, since the municipalities are responsible for providing concrete integration measures in many social areas such as housing, work, language courses, etc. Against this background, the paper analyses the role of local governments in this process and discusses different challenges in dealing with this new era of migration and integration in Germany.

Keywords: migration, integration, refugees, local politics, Germany

1. Introduction*

The humanitarian decision of the German government in 2015 to (temporarily) open the borders, caught both politics and administration by surprise. Over two million migrants and refugees entered Germany – more than ever before in its history – leading to a chaotic situation which was labeled as a “refugee crisis” (Gesemann & Roth, 2017, pp. 7-8). The year 2015 in particular may be regarded as a watershed in migration policies in Germany. This mass migration challenges Germany in many ways, especially with respect to the long-term integration process of refugees.

While widely debated on the national political level, local governments play an important role in this process. Although the framework for action with regard to integration is in many ways set by federal and state politics (national government provisions, for example, frame the integration process through economic, labor market and social policies, and through its family, youth and women’s policy; while state governments (*Bundesländer*) influence integration through general education and cultural policies), the local level is crucial for the execution and management of the integration process as it provides concrete integration measures in many social areas such as housing, work, language courses, etc. Thus, the municipalities are predominantly responsible for shaping the concrete living conditions of the people *on site* (Deutsche Bundesregierung, 2007, p. 19).

Furthermore, municipalities do not only have mandatory administration tasks, which are delegated from the state level to the local level and do not

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allow any interference from the respective state (for example, as carriers of a school or other education institution), but they also have voluntary self-administration tasks, which go far beyond basic provisions and can include language courses or advisory centres that are even available to those asylum seekers with an unclear status (Schammann & Kühn, 2017, pp. 7-8). In fact, various municipalities have developed special approaches to shape the integration of foreigners in Germany in their respective communities. Their scope of autonomous action allows them to build a specific administrative and political framework for integration management in their municipalities (Bommès, 2018, pp. 104-105). The *integration practice* therefore mostly occurs *locally* (Bommès, 2018, pp. 103-104).

Against this background, the article aims to describe the specific role of local governments in the integration process in Germany and discusses different challenges for the municipalities in dealing with mass migration in Germany today. The question asked is: how do German local governments influence the reception and integration process of refugees since 2015 and what are the specific challenges that they face? The article draws on the current state of research and provides a review of the literature in order to share these findings with a broader international research community. Since there is as yet no comprehensive research that entails all the municipalities, the article gives individual examples and points out certain similarities and differences based on the size of the municipalities, their financial situation and regional location, since these conditions among different municipalities in Germany vary tremendously. Several municipalities, for example, have gained experience with the integration of immigrants over many decades and have consequently established the necessary capacities in their communities. Other municipalities, especially in Eastern Germany, are confronted with such a large number of immigrants for the first time and still have to build up the necessary infrastructure, as well as to involve the population in the process. Furthermore, some municipalities (especially in Southern Germany) have much better financial resources to meet this challenge than others, such as the highly indebted communities in the Ruhr area, the former industrial heart of West Germany. In some municipalities migrants have been establishing their own structures of self-help groups for decades, which today play an important role in the integration process of the newcomers. In other areas these networks have yet to be built. Considering the enormous task of the immigrants' long-term integration into German society, these different preconditions in the municipalities present a significant challenge for the integration process.

In the following chapter, we will present a brief history of the different migration phases to Germany that form the basis for understanding the current situation in Germany. Following that, the different political actors in the reception and distribution, as well as in the integration process of the refugees in Germany will be outlined, emphasising the prominent role of the municipalities in these processes. The last part of the paper deals with the regional and local differences of local integration management and identifies key challenges that various municipalities will have to address in the future in order to handle the new situation properly. The concluding part will provide a brief summary of the main findings and give an outlook on integration practices in Germany.

2. History of Flight and Migration to Germany since 1945

Flight and asylum are not new phenomena for Germany. Over the decades, there has been large-scale movement to post-war Germany from different regions of the world. In fact, millions of Germans fled from the Soviets in the former eastern parts of the German Empire to the new Federal Republic of Germany directly after World War II. Later, an additional 2.7 million people fled from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to West Germany (ending in 1961 when the Berlin Wall was built).

In the phase of the economic boom, or the so-called economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*), between 1955 and 1973, millions of workers from Southern Europe were drawn to Germany, mainly from Italy, Greece and later Turkey. These so-called guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) were especially welcome for the economy and had an important impact on the steel industry in the Ruhr region until the economic recession of the 1970s (Gans & Pott, 2018, pp. 17-18). Up until 1973 Germany received more than 500,000 immigrants per year (net), following which family unification brought further migration to Germany, especially between 1973 and 1985. Another important phase of immigration started in the mid-1980s when asylum seekers and refugees, mainly from Vietnam and the Balkans came to Germany, peaking at 1.5 million immigrants in 1992 (see Graph 1). The immigration during this time led to a rise in xenophobic tendencies, especially in Eastern Germany, which had experienced little immigration in the decades before, the exception being project tied workers from the so-called socialist brother countries like Vietnam. This, in turn,

triggered new, stricter migration policies and ended in the well-known Dublin Regulation and a new stricter German asylum policy (*Asylkompromiss*) in 1993. However, with the end of the Yugoslav wars, 75 per cent of the refugees went back to the new states of Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia (Haug, 2017). In addition, the new immigration policies, especially the Dublin Regulation, allowed for rejections of political asylum and the re-transport of asylum seekers to neighbouring countries on the border of the European Union and the Schengen Area, meaning that migrants could be sent back to the country from which they had entered the European Union. In a basically landlocked country such as Germany there was no direct access from outside the European Union. Consequently, migrants could only come to Germany indirectly, via different quotas in the European Union (Gans & Pott, 2018).

Following the collapse of the USSR and the end of the divide between the Eastern and Western Blocs in 1989, millions of the so-called late immigrants (*Spätaussiedler*) immigrated from the former USSR or Russian republics to Germany (especially between 1987 and 1999). Furthermore, the enlargement of the European Union after 2004 led to more immigration, whereby the free movement of people included new opportunities especially for workers. With the accession of Eastern European countries to the European Union there was an interim phase where work opportunities and rights were restricted for migrants from these countries. Nevertheless, with the end of this phase, new groups of legal immigrants from Eastern Europe tried to find work opportunities in the richer countries of Western Europe – Germany among them. However, in most years, there was only a very small surplus of immigration. In fact, there was even a negative balance in 2008 with more people leaving Germany than immigrating.¹ From 2009 onwards, immigration increased again from around 750.000 people to 1.5 million people in 2014 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019).

As already stated, 2015–2016 can be considered the most intense period of immigration in German history, which served as a reminder of the sit-

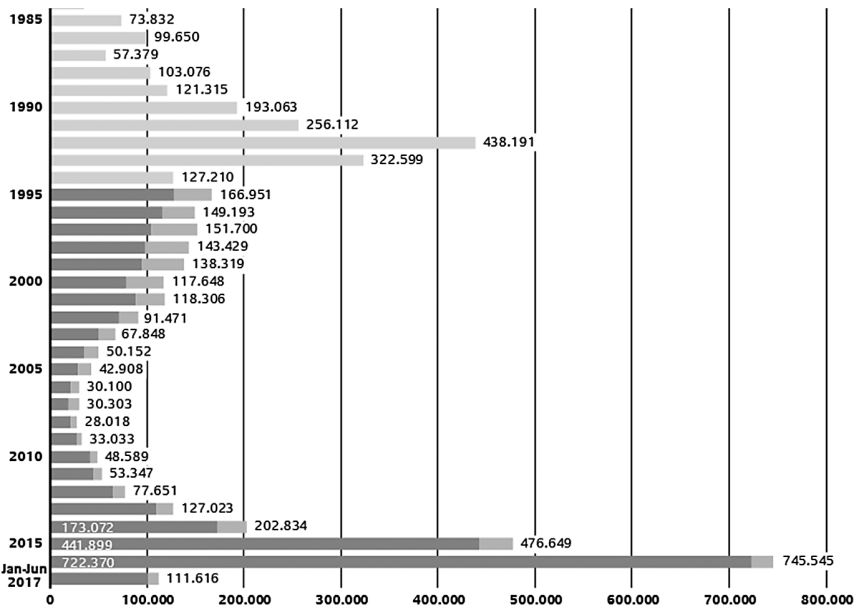
¹ One reason lies in re-migration, which is often ignored in German cities because citizens do not de-register. For example, first-generation Turkish immigrants, but also those from the Mediterranean countries, often went back to their home countries after retirement. In Turkey however, some of them faced problems with reintegration and since 2006 it has been possible to observe this for younger age groups of Turkish immigrants. In 2015 statistics showed that circular migration was relatively high in the exchange between Poland and Germany (BMI & BAMF, 2015). By this time, emigration from Germany had grown to 750,000 and peaked in 2013, with nearly 1 million people leaving the country.

uation after World War II. The number of asylum seekers (accepted and applying) increased with the crisis and civil war in Syria by more than 150% since 2014, with around 500,000 new applications per year (see Graph 1). More than half of the Syrian refugees in Europe applied for asylum in Germany in the period 2015–2016 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2017). Within these two years, over 1 million asylum seekers and migrants arrived from Syria, as well as Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries, mostly via the Balkan route (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2017).² Some were political refugees according to the Geneva Convention, while others were considered temporary refugees. All in all, more than 2.1 million people immigrated to Germany in 2015 alone. This is the highest recorded number since the founding of the Federal Republic.

However, due to the revitalisation of the restrictive Dublin Regulation, as well as stricter policies in Eastern European countries and in Turkey (resulting from the so-called Turkey-EU-Statement), migration into Germany ceased nearly altogether by the end of 2016 (see Graph 1). This was mainly due to the fact that the German Parliament expanded the list of countries regarded as safe countries of origin in 2016 to include the Maghreb states, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, whereas the status of Afghanistan was changed to unsafe again in 2017. Following a heated discussion in 2016, the German national government changed its migration policy drastically with an outcome, among other measures, which forbade family reunification for temporarily accepted Syrian refugees (under subsidiary protection), despite the fact that this is a requirement under international law. Consequently, some 200,000 family members are waiting to reunite with their family members in Germany. As a result of these measures, in 2017 the number of applications declined sharply (see Graph 1).

² It is necessary to mention that these immigration statistics are problematic. In Germany, all citizens have to register according to the law, but there is a large number of informal immigrants in the country. Furthermore, despite central registration for citizens, in German federalism the autonomous cities and municipalities actually implement the registration process themselves. Therefore, statistics for asylum seekers are quite unreliable. Administration staff at all levels face problems with registration, census, and the central register. In some central camps in Bavaria, for instance, there were twice as many people accommodated in 2017 than were identified as asylum seekers in the whole of Bavaria.

Graph 1. *Asylum Application 1985-2017 in Germany*



Source: Authors (based on Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2017, p. 3, with the statistics until 1989 for West Germany only).

All in all, more than 19.7 million people with a migration history³ were living in Germany in 2018. This accounted for almost one quarter of the total population. According to Krummacher (2017), 95 per cent of these migrants were living in Western Germany in 2017 and only a few in the new East German states (*Ländern*) (see Table 1). Furthermore, 44 per cent lived in metropolitan areas, 30 per cent in medium-sized municipalities, and 26 per cent in smaller towns (Krummacher, 2017). The percentage of people with a migration history in Germany will rise further in the years to come. For example, in the group of children below five years of age, the percentage of people with a migration history accounted for around 35 per cent, whereas in the 35–44 age group, the percentage amounts “only” to 25 per cent of the general population. The percentage is rising, especially in bigger cities. Even in Saxony, the number of people with a migration history has more than doubled within the past two years.

³ This includes all persons with a personal migration experience and their direct descendants (Federal Statistical Office, 2012, see Haug, 2017).

Table 1. *Population with Migration History (Migration Background - Migrationshintergrund) in Germany 2016*

State (Bundesland)	Percentage
Bremen	30.5
Hesse	30.2
Hamburg	30.0
Baden-Württemberg	29.7
Berlin	28.0
North Rhine-Westphalia	27.2
Bavaria	22.9
Rhineland-Palatinate	22.6
Saarland	20.0
Lower Saxony	19.6
Schleswig-Holstein	14.4
Saxony	6.5
Brandenburg	6.5
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	6.3
Saxony-Anhalt	6.2
Thuringia	6.0

Source: Authors (based on the Statistical Yearbook of the Federal Republic of Germany 2017).

3. The Refugees' Path into the Municipalities: Reception and Distribution of Refugees in Germany

Dealing with the preconditions and procedures of the current reception and distribution of refugees in Germany, it is first and foremost important to recognise that migration policies in Germany, especially the asylum policies, followed a specific administrative and political culture after 1945. Because of German history and the experience of the Nazi regime, the German Constitution (*Grundgesetz*) emphasises in article 16a the human

right to asylum. During the Nazi regime, thousands of political refugees and members of ethnic and religious groups, such as the Sinti, Roma, and Jews, had to leave their homes and received asylum in countries all over the world. For this reason, human rights related to the issue of asylum are regarded as very important in Germany and thus legal action and proof of the right to asylum and political reasons for migration were included in a detailed, long-term judicial investigation.

In the current political and legal process of the reception and distribution of refugees in Germany, the federal level is primarily responsible for initiating and implementing asylum procedures.⁴ The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF*) is the main executive office dealing with the registration and repatriation of migrants in Germany. The BAMF is responsible for all asylum proceedings and has the power to grant or deny asylum. After the asylum seekers have entered Germany, the BAMF distributes them to its regional branch offices which are located in all the federal states in Germany. From then on, the federal states are responsible for the entire application process (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016, pp. 2-5*). Once under state authority, the asylum seekers are accommodated in arrival centres which are run by the federal states and which then assume responsibility for them. The asylum seekers' distribution to the arrival centres follows a specific formula (the so-called *Königssteiner Schlüssel*) which regulates the amount of asylum seekers each state receives (see Table 2). The relevant variables for this calculation are economic strength (tax income) and population size. After the proceedings in the arrival centres, which usually take several days or weeks, the states in turn distribute the asylum seekers to municipalities and cities within their territory (Aumüller, 2018, p. 179). The asylum seekers must stay in their assigned municipality until their application process is completed. The state of Bavaria is the only exception to this rule. In 2015, Bavaria first set up the so-called arrival and return centres (*Ankunfts- und Rückführungseinrichtungen, ARE*) that gather all asylum seekers with a so-called low return perspective. This includes asylum seekers from the so-called safe third countries that are meant to

⁴ The European Union also influences German asylum laws. While the Dublin II (2003) and Dublin III (2013) Regulations regulate who is responsible for asylum seekers from third country nations, other EU-guidelines regulate which criteria govern the decision on applications (*Qualifikationsrichtlinie zur Feststellung der Flüchtlingseigenschaft*), how to conduct an asylum process (*Verfahrensrichtlinie zur Durchführung des Asylverfahrens*), and how to treat and accommodate asylum seekers correctly (*Aufnahmerichtlinie zur menschenwürdigen Unterbringung und Behandlung von Asylsuchenden*).

be returned as quickly as possible. However, according to several reports, in practice many people stay in the centres for longer than three months (Schader, Rohmann & Münch, 2018, p. 94, pp. 97-98). In 2018, the federal government announced the introduction in all federal states of centralised sites for the reception and return of asylum seekers and for the processing of their asylum-claims (*Zentrum für Ankunft, Entscheidung, Rückführung, AnkER*) based on the Bavarian model. The Bavarian centres have been considered to be both part of a government strategy of deterrence and an attempt to gain control of the matter (Schader, Rohmann & Münch, 2018, pp. 91-92).

Table 2. *Asylum seekers per state after the application of the Königsteiner Schlüssel in Germany, 2019.*

Rank	States (Bundesländer)	Share of asylum seekers per state (Bundesland) 2019
1	North Rhine-Westphalia	21,1 %
2	Bavaria	15,6 %
3	Baden-Württemberg	13,0 %
4	Lower Saxonie	9,4 %
5	Hesse	7,4 %
6	Berlin	5,1 %
7	Saxony	5,0 %
8	Rhineland-Palatinate	4,8 %
9	Schleswig-Holstein	3,4 %
10	Brandenburg	3,0 %
11	Saxony-Anhalt	2,8 %
12	Thuringia	2,7 %
13	Hamburg	2,6 %
14	Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	2,0 %
15	Saarland	1,2 %
16	Bremen	1,0 %

Source: Authors (based on Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019).

While it usually depends on the size of the city, the amount of asylum seekers assigned to a municipality varies from state to state. However, neither the municipalities nor the asylum seekers have a significant say in this matter. Once the municipalities have assumed responsibility for the asylum seekers, they are tasked with guiding them through the asylum process, which includes legal procedures, social health care, accommodation, etc. The municipalities must cover all costs associated with the asylum process. While the state will reimburse those costs, the exact amount varies considerably from state to state. In some states, the municipalities will be reimbursed for their expenses to the last cent, however, other states only reimburse a lump sum which does not cover all the municipalities' expenses (Schammann & Kühn, 2017).

4. Integration of Refugees at the Local Level

As previously mentioned, the integration of refugees mainly takes place at the local level where the municipalities are responsible for a wide range of services. These include the implementation of the Residence Act, granting of social benefits, provision of health care services, accommodation, organization of integration and German language courses, provision of early childhood and school education, as well as support for labor market integration. The municipalities exercise considerable discretion as to how they operate these services. Even though it is technically within the federal level's jurisdiction, municipalities have some political influence regarding the right of residence. In fact, the federal level has largely delegated the implementation of the Residence Act to the states, which in turn delegate many of their competences to the local authorities. This has been made possible by the so-called state accommodation and registration acts (*Landesaufnahmegesetze*) (cf. Schamman & Kühn, 2017). According to Schammann and Kuehn (2017) almost all residence status rules, beyond the asylum decision, are conducted and implemented at the local level (p. 7). Although the states are legally responsible for the expert supervision of the Foreigners Authorities (*Ausländerämter*) and set the framework guidelines through the above-mentioned state accommodation and registration acts and corresponding decrees, the municipalities still get to exercise some discretion since numerous legal concepts and decrees within German immigration law leave some room for interpretation (Schammann & Kuehn, 2017, p. 7). Local authorities are therefore often faced with the need to interpret federal laws in their daily practice (Schammann &

Kuehn, 2017, p. 7). Frequently, this means having to make substantive decisions such as the extension of residence permits, the permission for family reunion, or the right to work. However, substantial differences between the municipalities can be detected with regard to how they interpret the law (Schammann & Kuehn, 2017, p. 7; Eule, 2014).

Municipalities also exercise some discretion over the provision of social benefits for asylum seekers, especially with regard to the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz, AsylbLG*), which regulates the uniform provision of benefits to all asylum seekers in Germany (this mainly concerns nutrition, housing, eating, clothing, health care and consumer goods) (§ 3 AsylbLG). Again, there are significant differences in the way that federal states and municipalities provide these benefits. For example, it is contested whether the social benefits provided to asylum seekers should be distributed as material or cash benefits (*Sach- oder Geldleistungen*), i.e., whether the asylum seekers receive a meal voucher or a corresponding amount of money for buying a meal (Schammann & Kühn, 2017). Similarly, the municipalities pursue different hard and soft strategies with regard to possible sanctions, for example, if asylum seekers refuse to take part in a language course or other integration measures. Municipalities also opt for different strategies when it comes to granting other social benefits, i.e., benefits that are not necessarily required by federal law but that the municipalities may choose to grant on top of the required benefits. For example, municipalities may choose to provide health care services that go beyond minimal treatment, such as psychotherapeutic treatment (Wächter-Raquet, 2016).⁵ In this case, the municipalities, or rather the individual officers in the local social welfare offices, decide relatively autonomously which treatments will be approved. The federal states and cities have developed various methods for this. On the one hand, municipalities in North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous state in Germany, introduced a so-called health card (*Gesundheitskarte*). At the doctor's office, refugees simply have to present their health card which allows them to seek all kinds of approved treatments. On the other hand, some municipalities in Bavaria examine and approve each case individually (Schammann & Kühn, 2017). It should be noted that the municipalities must initially cover the costs of health care for refugees from their own funds. Subsequently, they may or may not be fully reimbursed by the federal government or the states. For this reason, local authorities

⁵ Within the first 15 months of their stay in Germany, asylum seekers only have the right to treatment “of acute diseases and pain” (§ 4 AsylbLG).

are very careful when it comes to approving additional health care treatments (Schammann & Kühn, 2017). For example, providing health care for asylum seekers cost the state of North Rhine-Westphalia an average of 660€ per asylum seeker in 2015 (see Wolf, 2016).

Providing accommodation is another challenge that municipalities are faced with. Since the search for temporary lodging and the coverage of the refugees' basic needs have by now largely been taken care of, long-term accommodation is one of the main tasks of municipalities today. It is with regard to accommodation that the municipalities' respective approaches probably differ the most. It is possible to distinguish between two models: The so-called decentralised accommodation strategy, where asylum seekers are mostly put up/placed in private apartments, and a centralised strategy, where municipalities set up big communal accommodation centres. The municipalities may decide relatively autonomously which approach they want to pursue. However, while decentralised accommodation is more cost-effective for the cities (Aumüller, 2018) and is considered as more positive in terms of integration policy (see especially Köhnke, 2014), many cities still prefer shared accommodation in centres; especially when it comes to asylum seekers whose status has not yet been clarified.⁶ Furthermore, the concept of an assigned place of residence does not take into account the integrative effect of an existing migrant network or self-help among the migrant community that comes along with freely choosing where to live (Hunger, Koning & Metzger, 2016).

Another of the municipalities' responsibilities is the organization and implementation of the federal integration courses. It is the municipal adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*), that play a central role in this. By 2016 nearly all of these education centres (93% in fact) provided language courses for migrants. On top of that, the local authorities enlist private companies or charity organizations to also provide language courses. However, not all asylum seekers automatically get to participate in integration courses as established in § 44 AufenthG (Bethschneider & Neises, 2017, 79f). Since the federal government only reimburses the costs for people with a long-term perspective, the municipalities have to draw the funds for the integration courses for all the asylum seekers without a long-term perspective from their own pockets. However, experience has shown that many people without a long-term perspective will nevertheless

⁶ In the above-mentioned arrival and return facilities (ARE) in Bavaria, asylum seekers and what are referred to as tolerated foreigners (*Geduldete*) live in these shared accommodation centres for up to four years (Schammann & Kühn, 2017).

stay in Germany in the long run. If the municipalities did not allow them to attend language courses from the beginning, they would lose important time to learn German. Therefore, many municipalities have begun to allow all of their immigrants to attend the courses, regardless of their residence status. As this is considerably more expensive for the municipalities, the decision often depends on their general financial situation (Schammann & Kühn, 2017).

Education in Germany mainly falls under the jurisdiction of the federal states. In fact, the federal level hardly has any competence in this area. The municipalities are primarily responsible for the provision and maintenance of school buildings and facilities. Once again, the approaches with regard to the educational integration of refugees varies from state to state. On the one hand, there are inclusive approaches where the inclusion of refugees into regular classes is in place, or at least intended, following a period of intensive language and preparation classes.⁷ On the other hand, there are segregationist systems of parallel classes for refugees. An extreme form of these parallel classes can be found in the aforementioned Bavarian arrival and return facilities (ARE). Here, special classes are formed which are not located at regular schools and school attendance is not guaranteed for all refugee children (Alexandropoulou et al., 2016, cited in Schader, Rohmann & Münch, 2018, p. 98).

Finally, the promotion of labor market integration is yet another of the municipalities' responsibilities. However, unlike accommodation, residence and social benefits, this is not a mandatory, but a voluntary supplementary task. The federal level strongly encourages municipalities to help create job opportunities for refugees in their specific communities as well as to create and coordinate a network of all players involved in integration, education and labor market issues on site (Schammann & Kühn, 2017, pp 24f.). These job opportunities may include charitable clean-up work in the municipalities (e.g. in the city park). Although work such as this is hardly suitable for labor market integration, it is supposed to give refugees an occupation during their waiting period (Schammann & Kühn, 2017, p. 25). Municipalities' efforts with regard to network and coordination activities range between inactivity and the creation of integration points that gather all relevant labor market players under one roof. The latter can be found

⁷ A few municipalities even started to improve educational opportunities for migrants. North Rhine-Westphalia for instance established municipal integration centres (*Kommunale Integrationszentren*) to coordinate the municipal integration work and support the education of migrants (Ulusoy et al., 2016).

in municipalities in North Rhine-Westphalia for example (Schammann & Kühn, 2017, p. 25).

5. Regional and Local Differences in the Integration Process

As it were, the process of integration in Germany starts with the asylum seekers' placement in the municipalities. The success of an integration process does not only depend on the individual refugee, their history, motivation, experiences and skills, but moreover, the local circumstances and the federal state the refugee is placed in play a decisive role in the success of their integration process. We have seen that the approaches to integration policies in the federal states and municipalities differ greatly depending on their respective integration philosophies (precautionary segregation to maintain the ability to return vs. precautionary and early integration), and the specific circumstances in the municipalities (Schammann et al., 2018). The crucial factors that play a role in these circumstances are the size of a municipality (large vs. small), its regional location (north vs. south, east vs. west, city vs. country) and its financial situation (poor vs. rich). In the rest of this chapter we will briefly highlight the importance of these factors and draw some conclusions for the future integration policy in Germany.

It is important to stress that the population size of a city for the most part explains the type of integration management a municipality conducts: whereas large cities tend to have a more intensive integration, small municipalities typically concentrate their efforts on individual problem areas, such as housing, rather than developing a comprehensive strategy. Bigger cities tend to have more experience with the integration of migrants and have therefore developed certain routines over the years as they were able to introduce integration measures quite early, whereas smaller municipalities only started to develop an integration management system since the early 2000s, when the federal level started to acknowledge and support the special role of local integration (Filsinger, 2018, pp. 196-197). In this respect, it is important to mention that the municipalities in East Germany did not have the integration experience that would be comparable to the municipalities in West Germany. As such, most municipalities in this region have not yet developed an integration management framework at all and were hit by the refugee crisis in 2015 quite unprepared. Whereas

municipalities in West Germany over the years developed certain structures and routines that helped facilitate integration management together with public actors, as well as a strong civic engagement (Aumüller & Bretl, 2008, p. 140), many municipalities in East Germany struggle with xenophobia, even though the migrant numbers are still relatively low compared to North Rhine-Westphalia for instance. In East German municipalities, fighting xenophobia is considered one of the most important tasks in the integration process. A study by Gesemann and Roth shows that over 66 per cent of East German municipalities rank this task as very important, whereas in West German municipalities less than half of the questioned local administrations consider it relevant (Gesemann & Roth, 2016, p. 14). A best practice example to include the native population are the citizen dialogues (*Bürgerdialoge*) in the municipality of Stendal, located in Saxony-Anhalt. The citizens can ask questions and get sensitised to the topic (Gesemann & Roth, 2017, p. 17).

The challenge of finding work is crucial for the integration process of most migrants. Once again, bigger cities offer much better access to the labor market, which is much bigger and more diversified as they have a longer migration history and an established self-help network among the migrants themselves. Today, many jobs are offered via networks and relationships. The most crucial step is to grant newly arrived immigrants access to the labor market as soon as possible, whether through internships or (unpaid) work experience. In this endeavour an established network of migrant self-help-organizations is crucial, since it can help to set up contacts between the new arrivals and local companies. In this respect, the municipalities can play an important role as moderators who facilitate these networks and contacts (Bommers, 2010). One such best practice example is Osnabrück, located in Lower Saxony. The municipality has been facilitating an active and successful social and labor market policy since the early 2000s. Crucial factors for the integration concept are intensive individual coaching and collaboration with firms and business associations across organizations (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2005, p. 18).

In this respect, other regional disparities also play a role. Considering labor market strength and unemployment rates, there is a strong north-south divide which influences the integration process of migrants (Aumüller & Bretl, 2008, p. 140). Although the unemployment rate has gone down since the early 2000s, the labor market still poses a bigger challenge for migrants in the northern part of Germany. Beyond that, most refugees want to remain in prosperous regions. In order to counteract this development, the policy of decentralisation has to create attractive employment

opportunities and cultural possibilities in medium-sized cities, which will reduce regional disparities and prevent the shrinking of regions and cities. In the long run, the city lights of big metropolitan areas with strong cultural venues, job opportunities, and reasonable housing can enhance the pull effects of smaller and medium-sized cities within Germany. Against this background, the aforementioned distribution process in Germany (Köingsteiner Schlüssel) is often criticized. Although this system is supposed to ensure fair distribution among the Länder, the characteristics of the municipalities are not taken into account (Thränhardt, 2018). Therefore, the goal to integrate migrants, for example in the labor market, cannot be adequately met because the system is far too static (Thränhardt, 2018, pp. 349-350).

The public budget of the municipality also plays a central role when it comes to implementing integration measures. The best integration concept does not have any merit if the local government has to work with an unbalanced budget. A survey from Gesemann and Roth that analyzed 270 municipalities concludes that one in ten municipalities currently experiences a budget crisis. Only 44 per cent of the questioned local administrations had a balanced budget and medium and large cities are especially affected by finance issues (Gesemann & Roth, 2016, pp. 10-11). Once again, the bigger cities have an advantage as they tend to have better organised civil society initiatives that can provide alternative integration measures. As such, civil society is considered an important resource in most municipalities. Civic engagement, for example through volunteer work in welcome and refugee initiatives, is considered crucial for the integration process (Gesemann & Roth, 2016, pp. 16-17). An extended role of civil society actors can also influence the municipalities' limited options due to budget issues in a positive way. In a survey from 2016, the questioned municipalities reported a high civic engagement, regardless of population size. While civic engagement is still strongest in cities with more than half a million inhabitants, even the smaller municipalities receive a lot of support from civil society actors (Gesemann & Roth, 2016, p. 20). Finally, the political incorporation of migrants plays an important role in the integration process. In Germany, only foreigners from European Union countries have the right to vote at local and EU elections. Third country nationals are excluded from the voting process and only have the chance to articulate and represent their interests via advocacy groups and elected political representatives within the parliaments. Therefore, special interest committees, such as advisory boards for migrants, were introduced in many German municipalities to represent migrant interests

at the local level. The boards have certain rights, as do other communities within the local government, including the right to be heard at the council and the right to speak and address the council. In certain areas, they can make proposals, often together with other committees. They also have their own small budget.⁸ However, so far only three states have introduced advisory boards to represent the rights of migrants in their legislation: Hessen (advisory boards for foreigners), North Rhine-Westphalia (integration councils), and Baden-Württemberg (Kersting, 2016). In these states, advisory boards for foreigners or integration councils must be implemented in most cities.⁹ In all other Länder, only some bigger cities and municipalities voluntarily allow the implementation of advisory boards for foreigners. Some bigger cities also introduced the institution of an ombudsman and migration officers, as well as special units and local administrations for cultural questions (Kersting et al. 2009). In some cases, civil society organizations, such as churches, NGOs, and other organizations are important actors for the migrant's advocacy (Krummacker, 2017; Haug, 2017), rather than the migrants themselves. However, political participation might be a key tool for integration and further investments will be inevitable. In this context, recent survey research and opinion polls showed that advisory boards for migrants are highly respected within the citizenry.¹⁰ Around 66 per cent of the citizens think that advisory boards for migrants are a very important instrument of political participation at the local level and it might be the best way to introduce newly arrived refugees into the democratic political process in Germany. Here again, the local level seems to be most adequate.

6. Conclusion

All in all it can be concluded that, even though the broader legal framework is set by the state and federal level, the success of the efforts for

⁸ Among the additional rights that have been requested are a higher budget and more binding decision rights, as well as the right to invite the mayor or other administrative employees to their council meetings.

⁹ In Hessen and NRW, regulations within the Länder constitutions and local government acts focus on the size of the cities, thus advisory boards for migrants are implemented in cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants (Kersting, 2018, p. 214).

¹⁰ For details of one survey conducted with 2,700 citizens and more than 600 councillors, see Gabriel & Kersting, 2014; Kersting, 2018

immigration integration in Germany will be largely decided at the local level. The local governments are responsible for shaping the specific conditions of the integration process through housing, the labor market, education and local political representation. However, the preconditions for these tasks are very different in the various municipalities. While some municipalities have an intensive migration history and experience with the integration of migrants in former decades, others do not. This serves as an important explanation for regional disparities. Furthermore, the financial situation of a municipality is a crucial factor when implementing integration measures. Some municipalities (especially in Southern Germany) clearly have more financial resources to meet this challenge than others, such as the highly indebted communities in the Ruhr area, the former industrial heart of West Germany. However, civil society initiatives, as well as strong migrant networks have also proven to be important actors in the integration process and thus have a mitigating effect on the aforementioned challenges. This demonstrates the importance of a local governance approach.

Nevertheless, high investments in the integration of refugees will be necessary, even if they will not always pay off right away. In addition to the purely humanitarian reasons that speak in favour of accepting and integrating refugees, this process also offers an opportunity for Germany itself. Despite the mass migration of 2015, Germany will continue to depend on immigration in the decades to come due to its shrinking population and strong demand from the labor market. According to the projected demographic change, by 2021 only a net immigration of 300,000 to 400,000 immigrants could stop the decline in the labor force. According to Haug (2017), no less than a net immigration of 400,000 to 530,000 people is necessary to stabilise the German working population. This means that Germany must prepare itself for an era of migration and develop a systematic and coherent migration and integration strategy, especially at the local level. The sooner this process begins, the better.

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COPING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF MASS MIGRATION: RECEPTION, DISTRIBUTION AND INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN GERMAN MUNICIPALITIES SINCE 2015

Summary

This article demonstrates how challenging the current migration is for the local level in Germany. As highlighted in the article, the integration of refugees mainly takes place at the local level, in the municipalities. The municipalities are responsible for a wide range of services, which include the implementation of the Residence Act, granting of social benefits, provision of health care services, accommodation, organization of integration and German language courses, provision of early childhood and school education, as well as support for labor market integration. The municipalities exercise considerable discretion as to how they operate these services and in effect, even though it is technically within the federal level's jurisdiction, municipalities have some political influence regarding the right of residence. However, the degree of involvement among German municipalities varies and the role they play in integration often depends on the history of migration within their borders, past development of migrant communities, their own financial situation and infrastructure, as well as how the public engages with the issue. Thus, the political action (or non-action) of the municipalities will be decisive in the long-term integration process of refugees.

Keywords: migration, integration, refugees, local politics, Germany

ODGOVOR NA IZAZOVE MASOVNIH MIGRACIJA: PRIHVAT, RASPORED I INTEGRACIJA IZBJEGLICA U NJEMAČKOJ LOKALNOJ SAMOUPRAVI NAKON 2015.

Sažetak

Rad pokazuje kakav su izazov migracije u razdoblju nakon 2015. za lokalnu samoupravu u Njemačkoj. Integracija izbjeglica uglavnom je zadatak lokalne samouprave. Lokalne su jedinice odgovorne za široki spektar službi što posebno uključuje provedbu Zakona o prebivalištu, odlučivanje o socijalnoj pomoći, pružanje zdravstvenih usluga, smještaj imigranata, organizaciju tečajeva za integraciju i učenje njemačkog jezika, osiguravanje predškolskog i školskog odgoja i obrazovanja te uključivanje u tržište rada. Lokalne jedinice imaju značajnu stvarnu autonomiju u odlučivanju o načinu obavljanja tih poslova i službi pa u tom smislu i određeni politički utjecaj na ostvarenje prava na nastanjenje usprkos tome što je ono pravno u rukama federalnih vlasti. Stupanj angažmana lokalnih vlasti varira tako da njihova uloga u integraciji često ovisi o povijesti migracija na njihovom području, prethodnom razvoju migrantskih zajednica, njihovoj financijskoj situaciji i stanju lokalne infrastrukture, kao i o lokalnom javnom mnijenju. Na taj je način političko djelovanje lokalnih jedinica odlučujuće za dugoročni proces integracije izbjeglica.

Ključne riječi: migracije, integracija, izbjeglice, lokalna politika, Njemačka