



Between “welcome culture” and deterrence: the case of Germany

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Abstract

After several improvements of the German asylum system and an expansion of refugee rights in the early 2000s, the increasing arrivals of 2014 and 2015 gave rise to a restrictive turn which entailed more surveillance and control of asylum seekers and a reduction of their rights and legal safeguards.

References

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Introduction

Since 2011, Germany has been one of the main countries of destination for refugees in Europe. Between 2011 and 2018, more than 2 million applications for asylum were filed. Most applicants were from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. While Germany became well known for its “welcome culture” vis-a-vis refugees in the beginning, it quickly has adopted various political measures of deterrence and exclusion.

Main Results

Our analysis has revealed three major trends of the German asylum system with regard to border security as well as protection, reception and integration policies in the aftermath of 2015:

1) Pervasive Securitization

Germany has adopted a securitized perspective on migration which framed refugees as a potential threat to domestic security and is reflected in a strategy of ‘double’ externalization (delegation to third states and private companies). These discourses have also shaped migration policies at the EU level.

2) Paternalism and Control

Internally, Germany adopted a restrictive regime of control and paternalist intervention on the level of the asylum determination process (protection) as well as on the level of reception. The paradigm of “Integrated Refugee Management” is associated with campization and an early separation of asylum seekers, based on collective attributes. It inspired the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum.

3) Integration in the name of ‘human capital’

In line with a dominant understanding of migration as a means to counter domestic skill shortage, asylum seekers with a “good prospect to stay” were channelled into early integration measures in order to maximize their economic potential.

Methods and Material

- Document analysis of legal and policy documents.
- Semi-structured interviews with 60 refugees and 27 stakeholders in the field of immigration.
- Qualitative content analysis based on a joint RESPOND coding scheme.
- Migration Governance network meetings.
- Taking in to account the federal system of Germany - field sites: Lower Saxony, Bavaria, Brandenburg & Berlin.



Lessons Learned

Fast track procedures and isolated mass accommodation centres have a negative impact on the ability of asylum seekers to obtain **sound information on their rights and duties**, which lowers their acceptance rates.

The centralization and acceleration of asylum have made independent organizations indispensable in order to secure fair procedures and early integration channels. Hence, **independent refugee support infrastructures need to be maintained and empowered.**

The post-2015 asylum reforms have produced high hurdles for asylum seekers to obtain the full range of protection standards laid down in international and European legislation. Instead, these **reforms produced a highly fragmented legal regime** which needs to be revised and embedded in a holistic strategy of immigration politics.