

ASYLUM IN GERMANY DURING THE *NEW EXODUS* - A SECONDARY ANALYSIS ON OFFICIAL REPORTS

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Abstract: *This article contains a synthesis of quantitative data relevant to the "European refugee crisis" which started in 2015, when a large number of people migrated from West Asia, South Asia and Africa to Europe, especially to Germany. I call this phenomenon "new exodus." Through secondary analysis of recent European and German official reports on migration I tried to provide a clear image capable of offering us the understanding of the social dimension of this phenomenon. I have also clarified the main concepts used in the public discourse on the refugee crisis, with focus on the "asylum seeker" – the main indicator in the European and German statistics.*

Key words: *Migration, refugee, asylum, Germany, integration.*

1. Introduction

This article contains an analysis on official reports about the new waves of migration in Europe and particularly in Germany. Using the secondary analysis on quantitative data from several European and German public reports, I tried to present a meaningful and accurate image about the recent "Asylum" phenomenon or the "refugee crisis" – a widely publicized and debated phenomenon over the past three years.

My approach is quantitative and through the descriptive analysis I want to highlight some important dimensions of the new migratory waves in Europe: their scale, the measures that the European states, especially Germany, have taken for the reception and integration of emigrants, as well as some results of these processes.

The present analysis focuses on Germany for two reasons: firstly, Germany is the European country that has received most refugees during the crisis that I call the "new exodus" in 2014-2017. Secondly, I personally lived a recent migratory experience in Germany, where I came in direct contact with emigrants from countries considered to be the largest "exporters" of refugees, like Syria and Afghanistan.

In a German language course I met women and men who had fled from the war and had lived traumatic experiences at home and on their way to Europe. Their integration into Germany is not easy, and attitudes and collective behaviours towards them are dual. On the one hand, many institutions and services have been created to facilitate their integration. On the other hand, the fear of host populations and the lack of confidence in newcomers, in the face of increasing insecurity in Europe, create many obstacles to integration.

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There are already many official documents that provide statistical data and these documents are important because they give us an overview of this phenomenon. However, I consider that research based on qualitative data and mixed methods is equally important for understanding the refugee crisis in Europe. According to Roberts et al. (2016), "preoccupation with numbers has, too often, ignored how each refugee is an individual, many of whom have experienced the most appalling conditions in their countries of origin and in transit " (p.1). I recently began to work on an ethnographic research on a group of Syrian refugees in Germany, but knowing the quantitative dimension of the refugee crisis a necessary first step is to understand the phenomenon and I am concentrating on this step in this article.

The concept of "new exodus" refers to the migratory waves that arrived in Europe coming from Asia and Africa between 2013-2017, with a peak called the *asylum crisis* in 2015. The people who came to Europe with these migratory waves are called *refugees*. According to the United Nations definitions, there is a difference between *refugees* and *migrants*: "refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution"; "migrants choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons" (<http://www.unhcr.org>).

The literature highlights various aspects of the response of receiving societies to the refugee crisis. The main idea is that the current situation of refugees can only be effectively managed through closer European cooperation, in order to develop a coherent asylum policy (Altemeyer-Bartscher et al., 2016, Straubhaar, 2015). The integration difficulties of refugees in the receiving societies had been studied even before the crisis of 2015-2016. Bekker et al (2014) analysed the impact of two post-migration stressors on the socio-economic integration of refugees in Netherlands: the length of stay in asylum accommodation and the granted residence status. The authors found that staying more than five years in asylum accommodation negatively affects refugees' mental health and also having a temporary refugee status hampers socio-economic integration, compared to refugees who have been already granted the Dutch nationality.

Many other issues are discussed in recent papers: costs for refugee accommodation and integration (Altemeyer-Bartscher et al., 2016), mental health and health risks of refugees (Bekker et al., 2014; Melhem et al., 2016), the European Union debate about the distribution and relocation of the refugees among the member states (Carlsen, 2017), measures for children refugee integration (Wimelius et al., 2017) etc.

There is also a critical stance on European asylum policies: "The European response to the refugee crisis has been lamentable [...] Humanitarian agencies are reporting that many refugees lack access to even basic primary health care, including maternal and child health services, and those with non-communicable diseases lack the continuity of care on which their health depends. Concerns have also been raised about the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, while children and young people are being separated from their families and left with limited protection. Europol has estimated that up to 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees have disappeared in Europe during the current crisis" (Roberts et al., 2016, p.1).

The data I am presenting further comes from the official reports of the European and German institutions responsible for migration. Through secondary analysis I extracted data, synthesized them and explained the most important indicators of the recent asylum phenomenon in Europe and particularly in Germany.

2. The Officially Recorded Amplitude of the *new exodus* in Europe and Germany

In 2015, Europe received the largest flow of refugees and asylum seekers since World War II (Kentikelenis and Shriwise, 2016). The conflict in Syria was the biggest driver of migration, but also the violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, abuses in Eritrea, poverty in Kosovo etc (<http://www.bbc.com>). Although not all of those arriving in Europe claimed asylum, many did. In 2015, 1,255,600 first time asylum seekers applied for international protection in the European Union, and 35% of them were registered in Germany (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>). In 2016, the number of first time asylum applicants in EU-28 was 1.20 million.

The main indicator of the statistics analyzed in this article is the number of *first time asylum applicant*. Asylum is defined as “a form of international protection given by a state on its territory. It is granted to a person who is unable to seek protection in his/her country of citizenship and/or residence, in particular for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>).

In the European official documents on migration, *first time asylum applicant/seeker* is defined as “a person having submitted an application for international protection or having been included in such application as a family member, for the first time.[...] A person can be recorded as first time applicant only if he or she had never applied for international protection in the reporting country in the past, irrespective of the fact that he or she is found to have applied in another Member State of the European Union (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>).

The number of first time asylum applicants in Germany increased from 442,000 in 2015 to 722,000 in 2016. Greece and Italy also reported large increases between 2015 and 2016. According to the German EASY system, which records those who intend to apply for asylum, there were 1,091,894 registrations only in Germany during January-December 2015 (www.iom.int). Regarding the outcomes of the asylum claims, in 2016, 61 % of EU-28 first instance asylum decisions resulted in positive outcomes (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>).

In 2016 in Germany 722,370 first time asylum applications were registered, most of which had been made by people from Syria (36.9%), Afghanistan (17.6%) and Iraq (13.3%). The table below contains data about the top five asylum applications in Germany in 2016 by country of origin (source: www.bamf.de).

Table 1

Top five asylum applications in Germany (2016) by country of origin

Country of origin	First time asylum applications
Syria	266.250
Afghanistan	127.012
Iraq	96.116
Iran	26.426
Eritrea	18.854

The chart below shows percentages of the top ten countries from which asylum seekers

come from in Germany (2016).

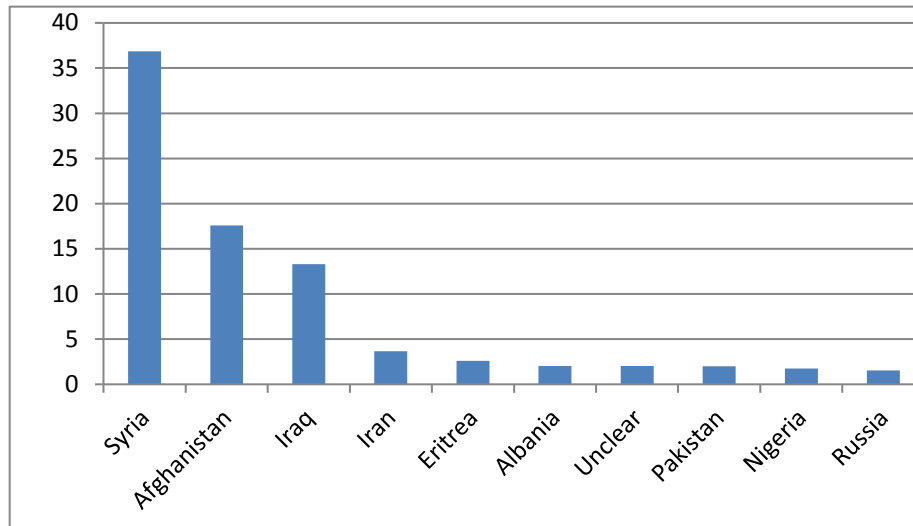


Fig. 1. Top ten asylum applications in Germany (2016) by country of origin (%)
Source: www.bamf.de

In 2015 the situation was different. Although 2015 was the year with the largest number of refugees arriving in Europe, only a fraction of them filed asylum applications during that year. In Germany, a total of 441,899 first time asylum applications were registered in 2015, and the countries from which most of the applicants came were Syria, Albania and Kosovo. For the comparison, I present below the data for 2015 on the structure of the previous ones for 2016: top five in absolute values and top ten in percentage (source: www.bamf.de).

Table 2
Top five asylum applications in Germany (2015) by country of origin

Country of origin	First time asylum applications
Syria	158.657
Albania	53.805
Kosovo	33.427
Afghanistan	31.382
Iraq	29.784

At that time, the prestigious German journal “Der Spiegel” spoke about the “Western Balkan exodus” and commented: „More than a third of all asylum-seekers arriving in Germany come from Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. Young, poor and disillusioned with their home countries, they are searching for a better future. But almost none of them will be allowed to stay” (www.spiegel.de, 26.05.2015). In a very short time, the new exodus gained much larger dimensions and changed the area of origin of asylum-seekers in Germany.

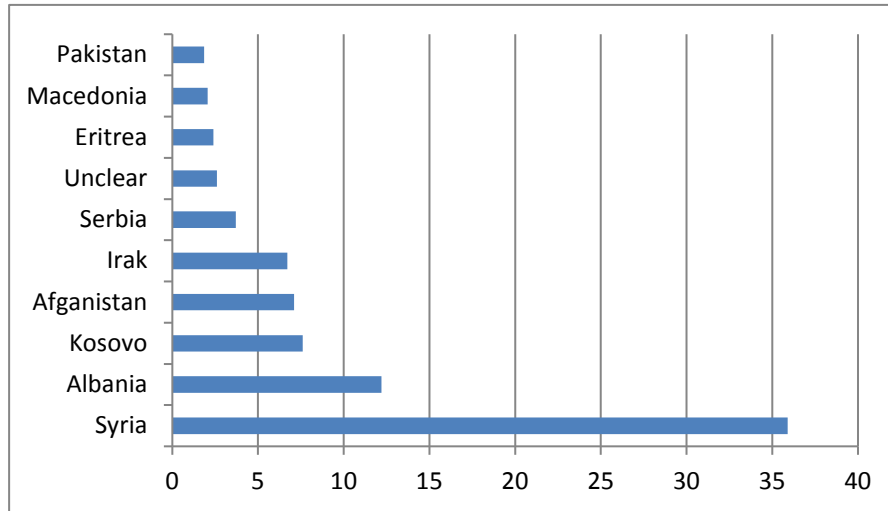


Fig. 2. *Top ten asylum applications in Germany (2015) by country of origin (%)*
Source: www.bamf.de

I made a comparative analysis of the evolution of asylum applications during 2014 - 2016 for the countries with the highest number of asylum seekers in Germany, and I found out that the most spectacular growth was registered for Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and a significant decrease was recorded for Albania.

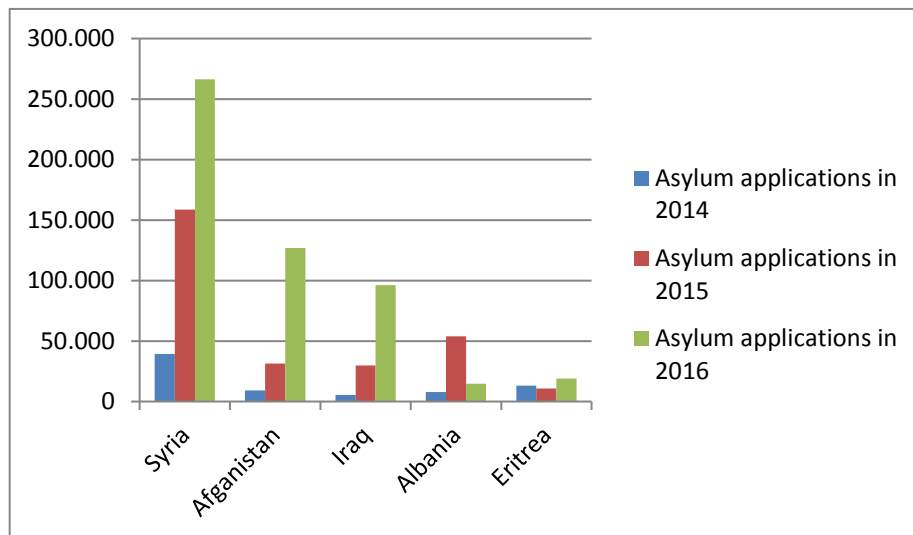


Fig. 3. *Evolution of asylum applications in Germany during 2014-2016*
Source: www.bamf.de

Regarding the positive decision for asylum requests, there is a big difference between the countries where refugees come from in the new exodus of 2015-2016 (Syria,

Afghanistan and Iraq) and the European countries such as Albania or Kosovo, which have a very low rate of positive asylum decisions. In 2015, positive asylum decisions were taken in Germany for 98% of Syrian citizens, 70.2% for Iraqis, and 55.8% for Afghans, and in 2016 positive decisions were taken for 96% of Syrians and only 0.2% for Albanians and 0.4% for people from Kosovo.

According to the *Asylum Quarterly Report.Fourth Quarter 2016*, published in June 2017 (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>), although Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis were the top 3 citizenships of asylum seekers, new trends are emerging in the European Union in 2016: “Asylum applicants from Venezuela (5 times more) recorded the most substantial relative increase in the EU in the fourth quarter of 2016 compared with the same quarter of 2015, followed by applicants from Azerbaijan (nearly 4 times more) and Turkey (more than 3 times more), while applicants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq have each dropped by more than -70 %”. The highest number of first time asylum applicants in the fourth quarter of 2016 was registered in Germany (37 % of all applicants in the EU-28), followed by Italy (18%), Greece (10%), France (10%) and the United Kingdom (4%).

Most first time asylum seekers in the EU-28 in 2016 were less than 35 years old (83%): 51% were in the age range 18–34 years and 32 % were minors. The distribution of first time asylum applicants by sex shows that more men than women were seeking asylum: in 2016, around three quarters of first time applicants between the ages of 14 and 34 were male.

3. Costs of Asylum, Fast-Track Procedures and Results in the Integration Process of Refugees in Germany

The refugee crisis has prompted the European Commission to increase by 3 billion euro the budget for migration allocated in 2015 and 2016, which was set at 4.5 billion euro before the start of the crisis. This budget increase was made to supplement the funds for the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF), to reinforce the EU Syrian trust fund (created in December 2014) and to finance the EU relocation mechanism of refugees between the member states (www.oecd.org).

In 2016, the Commission has launched two emergency funds to address the root causes of displacement in refugees' countries of origin and offer assistance to countries through which they transit: the new European Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (1.8 billion euro) and the Refugee Facility for Turkey (3 billion euro) (www.oecd.org, <http://ec.europa.eu>). Practically, the European Union has doubled its migration budget to meet the challenges of the new exodus in 2015 and 2016.

Germany spent 16 billion euro (0.5% of GDP) on its migrants in 2015 (<https://www.oecd.org>) and 21.7 billion euro in 2016 (www.politico.eu). The economic impact of the new waves of refugees on the German labor market is largely discussed in Germany. Although the debate focuses often on the short-term costs that emerge because of the need for integration measures (accommodation, education, health care etc), however, according to the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) there will be some positive long-term effects, as refugees to Germany will positively contribute to the economic performance of the country (www.iom.int).

Starting from 2015, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has intensified its efforts to fast-track procedures for the new asylum seekers with the establishment of more than 20 new “arrival centres”, were various processes such as

registration, identity checks, and interview are carried out. The average duration of asylum procedure in Germany was 5 months in 2015 and 7 months in 2016, but the length of this procedure depends on the country of origin of asylum seekers: the shortest period was for Syria (3.6 months) and the longest was for Pakistan (15.4 months). Between 2012 and 2016 the applications of asylum seekers from certain countries were prioritised: the length of the procedure has become shorter for high-risk countries (Syria, Eritrea, Iraq) and longer for countries considered safer (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo) (www.asylumineurope.org).

The Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz*) regulates in Germany the reception conditions for asylum seekers. They receive both non-cash and cash financial benefits, but only in the town or district to which they have been sent by federal authorities. The amount of the monthly financial allowance granted to asylum seekers starting from March 2016 is 135 euro for a single adult in accommodation centre and 351 euro for a single adult outside accommodation centre. Adult partners in common household receive each 122 euro in accommodation centre and 316 euro outside accommodation centre. Children receive an average monthly allowance of 79 euro in accommodation centre and 242 euro outside accommodation centre (www.asylumineurope.org). I calculated that a family with two parents and two children in accommodation centres receive an average monthly allowance of 402 euro in accommodation centre and 1,116 euro outside accommodation centre, this latter figure representing half of the average monthly salary in Germany (2,270 euro in 2017) (www.reinisfischer.com).

The asylum seekers who are accommodated in reception or accommodation centres are provided with the necessary means of food, clothing, heating and sanitary products. Many of these centres are former army barracks which have been renovated. A typical room in such a centre has between two and four beds, “there are chairs and a table and each resident has a locker for herself or himself. Size of rooms may vary, but rooms with a single bed are highly exceptional”

(<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany>, 2016 update March 2017, p. 62). There are shower rooms and toilets which people have to share. “Where guidelines are available, it is recommended that one shower should be available for 10 to 12 persons, but in some reception centres the ratio is worse than that, particularly in situations of overcrowding. Cleaning of shared space (halls, corridors) as well as of sanitary facilities is carried out by external companies” (ibidem, p. 62-63). Overcrowding was a serious problem throughout 2014 and 2015. The situation improved in 2016 due to a significant decrease in the number of newly arriving refugees (idem).

An important issue for the asylum seekers is education and employment. In Germany, asylum seekers can apply for an employment permit after a period of 3-6 month from their registration, and all children who reside in Germany have the right and the obligation to attend school, regardless of their status. However, the German educational system faces many problems in addressing the specific needs of newly arrived children (idem).

The most important educational offer from the German state for adult immigrants is, since 2005, the Integration course (Integrationskurs), which includes 600 hours of German-classes (up to B1 level) and 100 hours of German political and cultural studies (Orientierungskurs), both ending with an exam. In 2016 these courses were mostly attended by asylum-seekers coming from Syria (42.6%). The percentage of Integration

course participants who obtained the B1 level at the final exam was 60.5 in 2015 and 58.5 in 2016, and for the level A2 the percentage was 31.9 in 2015 and 33.5 in 2016. (Scheible, Rother, 2017). So only half of immigrants obtained the B1 level, which is required on the labour market for most professions and absolutely necessary for immigrants to apply for a qualification course. I have not found recent data showing the success rate for these exams based on variables such as country of origin, gender or age.

In 2016, The German Federal Office for Migration (BAMF), The Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) coordinated a survey on the socio-economic status of the new refugees in Germany (Brücker et al, 2016). 2,349 interviews were conducted with refugees (over 18 years old) who had arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016 and who had applied for asylum before the time of the survey. The results of this research are important to outlining an image of the migratory experience of refugees in the *new exodus*. I will briefly present some of these results:

- The most important reasons of their departure to Europe were: fear of war and violence (70%), persecution (44%) and forced recruitment (36%), partly related to poor living conditions (39%). About 60 percent of the refugees came directly to Germany and 40 percent came through transit countries.
- The main reasons for choosing Germany as the destination country were: the respect for human rights (73%), the education system (43%) and the welcome feeling (42%). 90 percent said they wanted to stay in Germany.
- On average, refugees spent 7100 euro per person to get to Germany. The average length of the trip was 40 days, and during the trip they were victims of ship diving (25%) or violence (40%).
- 53% of respondents were living in private accommodation and 47 % in a community accommodation. The former were much more satisfied with the living conditions than the latter (75% of the respondents living in private accommodation and 43% of those living in community accommodation were very satisfied or satisfied).
- 19% of respondents had higher education 58% had over 10 grades (lower compared to Germany, where the percentage is 88), and 9% had no education.
- 44% want to attend a middle school in Germany and 20% want to attend a higher school.
- On their arrival in Germany, 90% of respondents had no knowledge of German language, but out of the respondents who had lived here for at least two years, 18% said they had good or very good knowledge of German, 35% average knowledge and 47% poor knowledge.
- 14% were working or doing practice. About one-third had participated in German courses of BAMF, one-third had participated in other language courses and one-third had not participated in any German course.
- Respondents with a professional qualification found their job most often through job centres (33%) or in newspapers and the Internet (10%), and those without a professional qualification found their job mostly through relatives, friends and acquaintances (60%).

3. Conclusions

In this article, I have synthesized relevant data on the new migratory waves in Europe, particularly in Germany, in order to understand the magnitude of this phenomenon and to see what the institutional emergency responses are to the so-called “refugee crisis”.

The reports I have analyzed come from three main sources: Eurostat, German Federal Office for Migration (BAMF) and European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). The main indicator I considered in the analysis of these reports was the number of asylum seekers. Some reports present data for short periods of time, others highlight the evolution on different dimensions of the migratory phenomenon and others contain information about the measures and outcomes of the integration process of migrants in recipient countries.

In my opinion, the main limits of these official reports are: 1) they don't capture the true amplitude of the phenomenon, i.e. the total number of refugees, but work with the concept of “asylum claim”; 2) most reports provide only partial, specific information for a shorter period of time (quarter or year), few of them having an analysis of the evolution of recent migration processes in Europe.

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