

POLICY REPORT

“Give Me a Chance!”:

Developments in Vocational Training for Refugees since the Summer of Migration in the Context of Migration Movements in Germany¹

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Abstract

This article looks into the background to recent migration movements in Germany. In order to understand the stance of the German government, as well as large parts of civil society, it is important to look at the longer-term historical setting of migration to and from the German-speaking lands. Ethnic-culturally German territories were for a long time areas of emigration. It was only from the 19th century onwards that patterns of large scale immigration began to emerge. Indeed, it was only after the reunification of modern Germany at the end of the 20th century that there was broad political, legislative as well as societal acknowledgment of Germany as a country of immigration.

The article goes on to examine the “summer of migration” in 2015 and the connotations of the high levels of immigration of asylum seekers and refugees – many of whom were young – which that entailed. Against the background of demographic change (Germany as an ageing society) and an increasingly dramatic skills shortage, there is a realisation of the need to enable young refugees to acquire relevant qualifications in order to better access the labour market. Developments in vocational training through the Dual System – in particular in Bavaria in southern Germany – are examined in this context. Shortages of skilled labour in small and medium-sized enterprises have been a key driver in establishing Vocational Training Classes (VTC). These aim to provide asylum-seekers and refugees with valid school certificates as well as a programme of job training orientation. These are the prerequisite to young refugees being able to go on to successfully attain vocational qualifications under the Dual System.

The final part of the article offers a considered assessment of the lessons to be derived from these programmatic developments over the last few years: What further forms of support are required to enhance the social and labour market integration of refugees, and what is the way forward for Germany in developing a sustainable, resources-

¹ This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License and was accepted for publication on 9/9/2023. It is based on a presentation at the Conference Save, Orderly and Regular Migration: Transnational Skill Partnerships, that was held at the Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt, 24-26/5/2023

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orientated set of immigration and integration instruments for newly-arrived (forced) migrants in the long term?

Key Words:

Germany; vocational training; integration; labour market access; influx; policy

1 A Brief History of Germany's Migration Movements until 2015

For a long time, Germany was a geographical, linguistic and cultural entity rather than a nation state. For this reason, among others, it was more often a source of emigration as opposed to a target destination for immigrants. There were patterns of migration to Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (e.g., well-known groups such as the *Siebenbürger Sachsen* or the *Donauschwaben*). Later, Catherine the Great, a princess originating from a small German principality, encouraged the emigration of her countrymen to Eastern parts of the Tsarist Empire, trusting in their ability to develop agriculture and networks of local trade with the concession of ten years of tax-free residence.

This was promulgated in the Edict of 1763 with a letter-of-invitation for potential colonists, as part of a policy of settlement also practiced in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in Prussia. It was attractive for many from German territories, as they could thus free themselves from serfdom and would enjoy religious freedom. It was followed up by a further edict under Alexander I in 1804 confirming the concessions for settlers. It is estimated that some 50-55,000 Europeans settled in the Ukraine, Moldavia and the Transcaucasus as a result (Krieger, 2017).

Prussia provides a good example of interest in the settlement of qualified immigrants. Following the revocation in 1685 by Louis XIV of France of the Tolerance Edict of Nantes, which had been promulgated in 1598 by Henri IV, the Prussian monarch, the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm, encouraged the immigration of French Huguenots into Brandenburg. His Edict of Potsdam of the same year (1685), guaranteeing freedom of religion and civic rights to the French Protestants, was an innovative step at that time and set a conscious counterpoint to the repressive religious policy of the French monarchy.

There was, however, a key economic motive underlying this approach. The Great Elector was particularly interested in drawing on the renowned skills of the Huguenots in textile manufacture to make uniforms for his army, and the relatively poor and sparsely-populated Prussian state profited from the immigration of a skilled and cultured elite into Brandenburg in the longer term. This is clearly evident up to the present day in the built-environment heritage of the French Protestant community as represented by the ensemble of the *Gendarmenmarkt* in Berlin – often said to be “Berlin’s loveliest square” (Hanewinkel & Oltmer, 2017).

The most important goal of emigrants from the German lands in the 19th century was of course America. It is estimated that some 20 million people from all over Europe left via the ports of Hamburg, Bremen and Bremerhaven in the course of the century. Some 5.5 million Germans settled in the United States between 1816 and 1914 (Oltmer, 2016). Large populations of German emigrants also accrued in South America in Brazil and Argentina and similarly in Canada.

Immigration into the German territories began before the unification of Germany under Prussian suzerainty with the upswing in coal-mining, steel and other heavy industries in

the middle of the 19th century. Labour migrants came primarily from Poland to the Ruhr area in the course of the Industrial Revolution. Despite the associated economic boom, there was considerable poverty and unemployment, and the factories were run under semi-feudal conditions. Some 40,000 to 50,000 Polish-speaking immigrants lived in the Ruhr area but found themselves confronted with pressure to assimilate to the German language and culture of the ethnic German majority, though there was nonetheless the shared religious faith of Catholicism. A Polish familial and cultural heritage has been evident in the Ruhr area ever since.

Covering migration processes during the First and Second World Wars as well as the inter-war period is beyond the framework of this essay. Nevertheless, we should note that part of the xenophobic, "master race" ideology of the Nazi regime categorized the Poles as Slavic "sub-humans" to be exterminated as part of the broader agenda of the genocide of the Holocaust which – with clear geographical, programmatic intent – established the extermination camps in Polish territory. This was the space designated for radical "cleansing" of the "racially impure" (Lehnstaedt, 2017).

At the end of World War II, Germany became a huge fulcrum of migratory movement as 12 million displaced persons – concentration camp survivors, former slave labourers and POWs – were relocated in 1945-47. A similar number of ethnic Germans and refugees came into the core central European German lands from the East, fleeing the advancing Red Army. These numbers of uprooted people presented huge logistical and organisational challenges, which the Allies had to deal with following the collapse of Nazi Germany.

The next significant wave of immigration came with the hiring of so-called "guest workers" on the basis of inter-governmental Employment Agreements, beginning with Italy in 1955. Labour migration was required with the burgeoning "economic miracle" in West Germany from the late 1950s and especially from 1961 with the cutting of the inflow of people of working age from the GDR due to the construction of the Berlin Wall.

Originally, workers were hired on the basis of the rotation principle, by which they were supposed to return home after two years. But both the employers and workers set their faces against this as there was little sense in sending workers home once they had acquired the requisite work skills and language basics, only to begin from scratch with the next batch of immigrant workers. Most were young and male (ca. 80%); as a rule they lived in barracks adjacent to their places of work and were employed as unskilled workers in sectors of industry which were unattractive to the resident population on account of low pay and poor working conditions (Berger & Mohr, 2010).

While most returned to their home countries, by 1973 some 2.6 million of these "guest workers" had settled in Germany. At this time, rising unemployment and the oil crisis caused by the Yom Kippur Arab-Israeli war led the German government to terminate the agreements, thus stopping the supply of labour migrants to Germany – officially at least.

Henceforward, the only legitimate path for continued immigration was family reunion, meaning that the proportion of the migrant population in gainful employment in Germany steadily decreased over the following years through the immigration of spouses and minors. The only exception to this was the continued immigration of medical and care workers as well as nurses, of which there was an ongoing shortage, from South Korea, India and the Philippines (Berlinghoff, 2018).

A brief summary of immigration to the GDR makes plain that 1961 was also a watershed moment for the East German state. Until the erection of the Wall, some 2.7 million East German citizens left for West Germany, many of whom were qualified workers. This gave rise to an increasing skills shortage in Eastern Germany. In the 1970s and 80s, there was a limited intake of young people from "socialist brother states", such as Vietnam, Cuba and Angola, who came to work, do apprenticeships or to study technical subjects such as engineering. Under the terms of these "state agreements", family reunion was not allowed and the migrants were obliged to return once their contracts (as apprentices or workers) had expired.

A number of exiles from Chile came to East (and West) Germany following Pinochet's coup against the elected government of Salvador Allende in 1973. Equally, numbers of "boat people" from Vietnam were given sanctuary in 1978. As a rule, both the labour migrants and refugees lived in hostels separate from the majority population, with whom they were only allowed to fraternise with permission. They received a part of their wage only after returning to their homeland and were obliged to hand over a part of their income to their government (Berlinghoff, 2018). In other words, migration to the GDR was subject to strict surveillance and control.

After 1990 and the reunification of modern Germany, there were other migratory movements. Apart from the strong internal movement of young people of employable age from the Eastern to Western *Länder* (federal states) the early nineties were also characterised by increased immigration of ethnic Germans from the countries of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. Equally, there was a rise in the number of asylum seekers. Many came to Germany during the wars and conflicts following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia.

However, increasing global mobility and the development of global migration networks meant that the world was "shrinking", inasmuch as not only asylum seekers with a clearly defined experience of persecution in the sense of the Geneva Convention (1951), but also many others with complex, multiple motives were on the move in search of a better, safer life.

One result of these developments was a dramatic increase in the numbers of people applying for asylum in the early 1990s – legal, alternative channels such as labour migration being largely closed – as Germany had one of the most generous asylum regimes worldwide as a key element in the legacy of the Nazi period. This migratory "displacement effect" gave rise to intense and controversial debate in Germany in the early nineties and resulted in wide-ranging restrictions in asylum procedure and recognition practice. This meant the number of those attaining some form of refugee status fell dramatically in the following years.

From the early noughties, a sea change in immigration policy gradually became evident, driven by an increasing awareness of demographic change (an ageing native population) and a skills gap – a serious problem for the backbone of the German economy, the *Mittelstand* (mid-tier) of small and medium-sized enterprises. Thus, alongside a liberalisation of the rules allowing assumption of German citizenship (1999), there was an encouragement of immigration of highly-qualified workers beginning with a *Green Card* regime starting in 2000 and the ongoing promotion of a somewhat nebulously-defined "welcoming culture" for immigrants. The key element in this was the rolling out of language

course and integration programmes to ease immigrants into the German education and training system, labour market and society (from 2005 onwards).

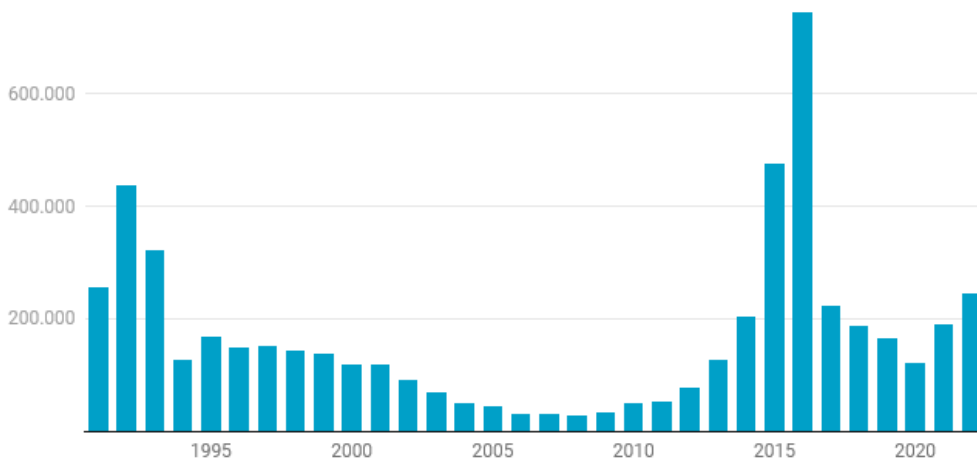
The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has since been responsible for the nationwide installation of these programmes to enhance long-term absorption of immigrants into German society. Since then, there has been the development of what may be termed an "integration industry", i.e. a range of actors in cooperation, from local administration, language course providers, social services, schools and a variety of civil society organisations to the entire gamut of political decision-makers at local authority, *Länder* and federal government level to enable the newly-arrived to adapt, adjust, acquire skills and access the training and labour market.

This is, however, based on the assumption that those concerned have a right to remain. Thus, these instruments are not available to asylum-seekers with little prospect of recognition or the right to stay in Germany. Equally those without residential status are excluded – rigorously. Germany is one of the countries adopting a policy of strict denial of residential status and access to social rights to *sans papiers* – though thanks to civil societal pressure, the undocumented have been allowed limited access to health care and schooling (Anderson, 2011).

2 The "Summer of Migration": The Influx of Asylum Seekers to Germany in 2015

It is against this historical background that we should view the dramatic turnaround in asylum policy in Germany which took place in 2015 and 2016. The following graph gives an idea of the development in the numbers of applications for asylum from the early nineties to 2019 in Germany.

Graph 1: Asylum Application Figures 1991-2022



Grafik: © MEDIENDIENST INTEGRATION 2023 • Quelle: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge • [Daten herunterladen](#) • Erstellt mit [Datawrapper](#)

Source: MEDIENDIENST INTEGRATION. <https://mediendienst-integration.de/migration/flucht-asyl/zahl-der-fluechtlinge.html>

As we see, the rise in entry of asylum seekers actually pre-dated the steep increase of 2015. The most important single cause was the collapse of the Syrian state after the failure of the "Arab Spring" and the descent of the country into a bitter civil war. Millions of people were uprooted, initially seeking refuge in the neighbouring states of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. There is little doubt that the enormous increase in Mediterranean forced migration movement was, to some extent, commercially driven: the hugely expanded *demand* for routes to safety from a relatively well-to-do Syrian middle class led to the creation of multi-million large scale professional human smuggling *supply* structures, from which other nationalities – with the financial wherewithal – could equally profit. In the 2010s, the large-scale mafia organisations in the Mediterranean shifted operations away from drug- to human smuggling – from forced prostitution to up-market provision of guaranteed smuggling services to target countries for the moneyed middle classes (Tinti & Reitano, 2016).

This background context led to the boost in migration pressure in 2013-15. To begin, the northern European countries continued to leave Italy and the other Mediterranean "front line" countries to deal with these issues alone. Signal moments, like intense media coverage of the tragedies off Lampedusa and Pope Francis' trenchant critique of the EU's evasion of human rights responsibility, helped prepare a sea change. Italy and Greece in particular were massively overstretched by the numbers of uprooted people arriving and, understandably, felt abandoned by the northern member states of the European Union in particular.

It was, however, the mass movement of refugees along the Balkan route in 2015 and the impossibility of stopping these human caravans without violence that prompted German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the summer to make what has become a legendary decision: to open the German borders, proclaiming "*Wir schaffen das*" ("*We'll manage it*"). The significance of this step was huge. A bottleneck had been created by the sheer numbers travelling the Balkan route and the Hungarian government, under Victor Orban, in particular refused to allow an official uptake of asylum seekers. Chancellor Merkel made the decision for a range of political and other reasons which cannot be explained in detail here. Suffice to say that one factor had been the acknowledgement that, in view of the German past, especially the Nazi period, the Federal Republic could not be seen to be repelling (by force) masses of refugees who were in evident need and clamouring for entry at its borders. The images of a broadly-welcoming German society accepting large numbers of refugees from the south went around the world in the summer and autumn of 2015. Within Germany, the longer-term challenges of absorption and integration have been a prime dimension of migration and integration policy in Germany since then.

In the international, and especially the European, context, the preparedness of Germany to take on board so many asylum seekers has been a novel development in migration and integration policy. The priorities arising out of the hugely-increased inflow of uprooted people at the European level focused, from the German governmental point of view, on sharing responsibility. Within Europe, agreements to distribute numbers of entrants (primarily) from the Mediterranean in the countries of the European Union proved particularly difficult to realise. This approach met with stiff resistance, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Externally, the focus was increasingly on closing down channels of access: shutting off the Balkan route, reaching agreements with the Libyan authorities to prevent migrants from

leaving their coastal area, an increasingly restrictive Frontex (the EU border management organisation) policy to prevent access to Europe from the sea and negotiations with the Erdogan government in Turkey to repatriate Syrians who reached Greece. From a humanitarian perspective – enunciated clearly in reports over the years by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR, 2007) – the policy of “pushback” of asylum seekers was clearly in contravention of the principle of *non-refoulement*. Moreover, the Frontex strategy denied migrants in need the internationally-recognised chance to make an application for asylum.

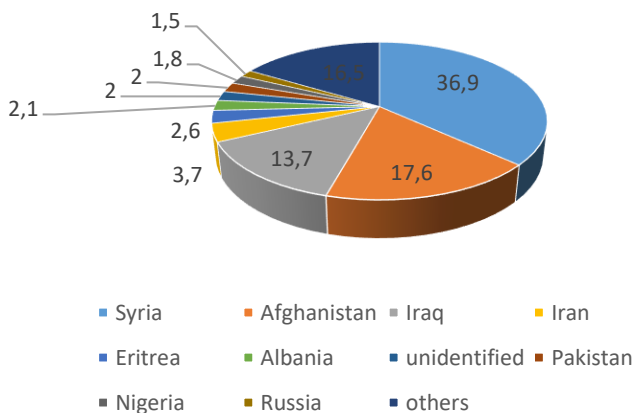
In 2016-2019, the humanitarian dilemma presented by migrant movement in the Mediterranean was put into sharp perspective by the missions of civil society initiatives from Germany such as the ships *Sea Watch* and *Sea Eye*, used to rescue migrant boats in distress. The vessels were frequently denied the right to dock at European ports – a policy promoted most vocally by the Italian populist politician Matteo Salvini – and indeed (in a grotesque juridical twist from a human rights perspective) helpers on board were faced with charges for “human smuggling”, potentially leading to sentences of many years of imprisonment for the ships captains, such as Carola Rackete of *Sea Watch 3* following her mission of June 2019 in which she rescued 53 migrants on the high sea (Rackete, 2019).

On the other hand, within Germany there has been innovative development educational and apprenticeship programmes for newly-arrived immigrants. In the following section, we shall focus on the particular educational and training needs of young refugees and the evolution of vocational training approaches in Bavaria to enhance skilled entry into the labour market.

3 Refugee Migration to Germany since 2014-15, Vocational Training and Access to the Labour Market. Vocational Integration Classes in Bavaria

2015-16 may in retrospect be viewed as the exceptional year for immigration to Germany. Below, we see a graph showing the division of asylum seeker applications in Germany according to nationality. It shows the preponderance of applicants from Syria.

Graph 2: The ten nationalities with the highest number of applications for asylum in Germany of the year 2016



Source: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (2016: 20)

The author's interviews and research form the basis of the following observations on the situation of the unaccompanied minors in Germany (Anderson, 2016). The research was conducted on the basis of the method approach of *Grounded Theory*, which aims to develop typologies and types. This enabled hypotheses to be developed and refined in the course of the empirical phase. In consultation with the Bavarian Ministry of Education and the City of Munich Schools Department, semi-structured interview guidelines were developed to address pertinent issues in and around the Vocational Training Qualification (VTQ) classes for asylum seekers and refugees. In a pre-test phase, initial interviews were conducted with experts, generating first tentative hypotheses which were refined and developed in the course of the main research phase.

After an analysis of the results, conclusions with recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners were presented to stake-holders in a final round of discussions. Validity of the analysis and practicability of the recommendations were the main focus of these discussions. Apart from young asylum seekers themselves, expert interviewees/interlocutors included teachers, social workers, therapists, administrative workers, local politicians and others. The study was published in 2016 and has provided the basis for ongoing decision-making on improvement of the VTQ classes.

One of the most interesting developments with the hugely increased influx of asylum seekers from 2015-16 has been the development of state-supported access to vocational training, in particular the so-called Dual System, an established educational programme enabling systematic technical and commercial qualification for the German labour market. This specific innovation for the new immigrant generation has been particularly pronounced in Bavaria in southern Germany, not least because the need for qualified personnel in manufacturing and production is so great in this part of the country. A key feature has been the development of Vocational Integration Classes specifically designed to provide asylum-seekers and refugees with a school qualification through a two-year course concentrating on vocational orientation, which enables them to go on to do an apprenticeship in any one of dozens of potential crafts and trades which are traditionally part of the German manufacturing, commercial and services system.

The driving factor for these training classes was the intermeshing of two factors influencing the readiness of the German *Mittelstand* (mid-tier, small and medium-sized enterprises) to mobilise resources for the qualification of this target group: demographic change (i.e. an ageing population) and a chronic skills shortage in a wide range of trades.

With the huge rise in asylum seekers entering Germany in the period of 2014-16, these classes have expanded enormously, from a few hundred students in the principal cities of Munich and Nuremberg in 2011-12 to a total of 1,150 classes with places for 22,000 pupils in the 2016-17 school year (Bavarian Ministry of Education, 2018). The numbers then reduced due to the diminished entry numbers of asylum seekers so that in the school year 2018-19, some 10,500 pupils were attending these classes (Bavarian Ministry of Education, 2019: 44).

In this context, training courses on developing intercultural skills have increased enormously, corresponding in the last few years with a drastic increase in demand from a whole range of professions in the social, health and educational sectors – from social pedagogues via child and adolescent psychiatrists to teachers in schools/classes of every

type and grade – providing the wherewithal to enable young refugees to pass the vocational training course successfully.

Professionals working in particular with asylum seeker families or unaccompanied refugee children have to be aware of the dangers of “culturally-tinted spectacles” as the German expression has it. Thus the ability to change one’s culturally-determined perspective (*What is the other person’s take on this situation?*) is an essential element in developing culturally sensitive skills and minimising potential sources of conflict (ErlI & Gymnich, 2013).

On the one hand, it is important not to ignore one’s own values and concepts; on the other hand, it is important to display a readiness for culturally-sensitive dialogue and exchange. This is all the more true when dealing with refugees who have entered Germany in recent years, who – in contrast to the generation of those with a migration background who have grown up in Germany – have experienced social conditioning outside the European context. The great majority of those entering the country as asylum seekers experience a “steep learning curve” in the course of a process of forced migration. They encounter, and must come to grips with, people with differing cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds on a daily basis and in varied contexts. This is particularly true of unaccompanied minor refugees.

Unaccompanied minors under 18 years of age are absorbed into the youth service system and, after an initial *clearing phase*, are allotted a place in a residential group for unaccompanied minors – assuming there are no adult relatives in the EU with whom family reunion can be initiated (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Landesjugendämter, 2014). The first goal of the newly-arrived is to get their bearings – in the comprehensive sense, to actually “arrive” in the here and now. In this context, the broad range of supportive networks for refugees which sprouted everywhere in Germany in the period between 2014-2015 are very important. Voluntary helper groups in larger and medium-sized towns as well as in rural villages provide often sustained longer-term support both for refugee families and unaccompanied young people. This mobilisation of local policy-makers, administration and professionals, especially in the educational, health and social sectors – together with civil society engagement – has enabled absorption and day-to-day integration of refugees. It has also turned their reception into a “mainstream” topic in German public discourse and policy-making.

If we examine the lives of the newly-arrived unaccompanied minors, we get an idea of the range of challenges they face. The top priority is learning the language, but they have to cope with the challenges of strange cultural surroundings, homesickness, grief and loss of their loved ones. Then there is the issue of trauma. Studies proceed from the assumption that at least 50% of unaccompanied minors suffer from some degree of traumatisation (Bergler, 2015; Hargasser, 2014). One of the important tasks facing care and social workers, teachers and other professionals is recognising the symptoms: sudden outbreaks of fright, blackouts, aggressive outbursts – but also apathy, pronounced sensitivity to light or loud noises, insomnia or acute withdrawal behaviour. In the Bavarian context the special training courses and professional counselling offered by the *Refugio* organisation, based in Munich, are of great value. This psychotherapeutic institute has specialised in the treatment of traumatised refugees and the victims of torture for over twenty years and has developed considerable expertise in therapeutic sessions conducted through specially-trained interpreters (Refugio München, 2020).

Practitioners emphasise the importance of getting access to language courses off the ground as soon as possible. The legal terrain is complex here, as access to courses is dependent on the intermeshing constellation of the individual asylum application, residential status and availability of courses on the ground. In practice, local voluntary networks often work in tandem with residential unit care workers to enable participation in a language course as soon as possible. Over time – and especially with the drastic reduction of new entries from 2017 – provision of language tuition has been made possible on a comprehensive basis.

“The group of refugees that has entered Germany in the last few years is extremely heterogeneous. This fact was emphasised repeatedly by expert interviewees, and herein reside the educational and vocational training challenges. Their social and educational backgrounds vary enormously and these factors intermesh with intellectual and experiential elements to determine levels of performance and achievement. Some unaccompanied minors will begin by wrestling with the basics of literacy in order to begin to learn the (German and native) language. At the other end of the spectrum, there will be pupils who have had 9 or 10 years of schooling, speak good English, have a grounding for an academic course in the foreseeable future – and may well have thought ahead to save their certificates in their cell phones before taking flight.

Soft skills are an essential part of the picture in terms of social acceptance, especially by their central European peer group: the young Syrian from Aleppo who speaks good English, has varied contacts on Facebook and Instagram, followed the latest Hollywood films and is conversant with Hip-hop culture, will establish contacts much more easily than, say, the young Afghan from a mountainous region with very little schooling, possibly a long and stressful period of forced migration because of lack of funds – as well as little experience with young women of his age who do not wear the veil. The latter will feel much more inhibited by the notion of Do's and Don'ts in the German Disco than will his Syrian counterpart.”(Anderson, 2019: 66-67)

It is natural for young people to want to feel free and autonomous. After a time of insecurity and the tribulations of the migration process, these young people need a time to get acclimatised, to *just be*, in order to recover something of their lost childhood (as a therapist put it). The need for support and for role models is an essential element in this, and the social workers in residential units or teachers and social workers at school are often key figures who can assume this role.

From a (social) pedagogic point of view, it should be borne in mind that these young men (more than 80 % are men) have an “assignment” to fulfil: they have been chosen to have the chance to get a good qualification and find a job in order to earn a good income. This is why the family of origin “invested” a considerable sum in the form of payment to the human smuggler. In an age of virtual communication, these familial expectations are much more ever-present (in the classroom, wherever the adolescent is living, in their contacts with other young people from their home area) than, say, 20 years ago. The social media, the tweets or the mobile phone messages mean that family members are consistently in the picture – sometimes, so teachers report, almost to the extent of being invisible presences in the classroom.

The accommodation situation plays a vital role in success or failure at school or during an apprenticeship. In residential groups for unaccompanied minors, the young people have as a rule a) the peace and quiet to do their school and homework, b) the resources to get extra tutoring if required and c) most important, the professional guidance and support to enable them to navigate their way among the 550-odd trades and vocations available

in the German system. Thus, they can be in a position to make informed choices about a potential apprenticeship or other venues of qualification.

The situation is very different for those over 18 years who are likely to be in a much more difficult position, because they may well be living in a hostel, maybe sharing a room with 3 to 4 other people, mostly adults and often with considerable burdens and stresses of their own. There is little space and scarcely the requisite peace and quiet to do their homework, after-school tutoring may not be available and advice on vocational training and apprenticeships will be at a premium. Moreover, there is the "social space" aspect: the young refugees will be acutely aware that they are in a social no-man's land. The hostel (mostly located in less desirable parts of town) is not the kind of place you invite your class friends to for a party or to impress your new European girlfriend. Young refugees have to learn to deal with feelings of embarrassment or shame due to these living conditions.

Searching for security and a sense of belonging, these young people are constantly undermined by a lack of secure residential status or recognition as a refugee in the narrower legal sense. Professionals pointed out in the interviews that even the fear of an impending deportation order can undermine their charges and render them incapable of concentration on their studies and everyday lives for weeks at a time.

With regard to taking on an apprenticeship, the unaccompanied minors (UMs) are faced with different types of pressure. There is the economic burden of having to pay back the debt to the human smuggler – who may well be tightening the screw on the home family to receive his money. The relatives will in any event be expecting some kind of "payback" from their sponsored relatives soon, and they may find it hard to grasp why training over three or more years should even be necessary ("*What do you mean sales training? You've been a salesman in our shop for years!*").

In addition to this, certain types of professions may be regarded as less prestigious. For instance, in some cultures working in the building trade is looked down upon as "dirty work." The issue of working with one's hands in any context may well be problematic for a young man who has been told by relatives that he *must* attain a university qualification. This is in turn a challenge for the social workers or teachers who have established a trusting relationship with their charges: keeping them on course for an apprenticeship. For, as the latter come to realise how long and stony the path to well-paid work in a qualifications-oriented society like Germany can be, there is the danger they may simply give up in frustration or turn to apparently "easier" but more fraught, and possibly illegal, ways of making quick money.

It is important for the receiving society in general to realise that these processes take time. UMs are (or should be) viewed as candidates for life-long learning. Resources should be made available so that they can have a second (or third) attempt at learning a trade. Once they have learned how things function in Germany, have mastered the language to the extent of comprehending the nuances of specialist terms and have a broader awareness of the range of vocations that they might choose from, the playing field begins to become level. Under these circumstances, stable and trusting relationships with experienced and caring professionals (as role models) will be the essential bricks and mortar to motivate

the UMs to stay for the long haul in the world of work, and not to succumb to a sense of resignation (Scharrer et al., 2012).³

Once students have completed their two-year course in the Vocational Integration Classes (VIC), they hope to have found a place for an apprenticeship. Experience has shown that, if possible, some form of *mentoring* is advisable during the initial phase of vocational training. The linguistic and specialist challenges both at the workplace and at vocational school are considerable. Moreover, whereas the UMs have enjoyed intensive tuition in the (smaller) VIC classes to date, at "conventional" vocational school they are faced with the challenge of specialist language terms relating to their field as well as front-on classroom teaching with limited or no resources for tutoring in smaller groups. In rural areas, the pupils may also have to wrestle with the additional difficulty of the strong regional (Bavarian) dialect the teachers may speak. Linguistically and socially, it may be hard for them to meet the challenges of the different "life worlds" of small-scale business and vocational school (Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung München, 2014).⁴

Nonetheless, there has, over the last few years, been a coordinated development of supportive labour market integration instruments at the local level for this specific target group. For example the local Labour Offices provide resources for measures like the Assisted Training Program (*Assistierte Ausbildung*), whereby a young asylum seeker is given language and vocational guidance by a social worker on a one-to-one basis. Problems arising at the workplace can also be dealt with, with the social worker acting as an intermediary, if required. Training supervisors at work, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) are often grateful for culturally sensitive advice regarding their charges, such as information on aspects of Arab customs, culture and Islam or advice on how to detect signs of trauma. Professional bodies, such as the Chambers of Trade and of Industry and Commerce, have supported integration in the workplace over the last few years by appointing Refugee Ombudsmen who advise and organise courses for the SMEs.

One of the greatest challenges facing the adolescents is the lack of secure residential status and the uncertain prospect of remaining in Germany. This is particularly true if students come from "countries of safe origin", such as Balkan states like Kosovo and Montenegro, but most controversially from Afghanistan. Policy became much stricter regarding this group after 2016 and only relaxed after the return to power of the Taliban in Kabul in 2021. The number of Afghani UMs has consistently been among the highest among all UMs. Many young people facing potential deportation have been in Germany for a number of years and are either in training or already have jobs. They dread the "yellow letter" from the Foreigner's Office, stating that they must leave the country voluntarily; if they fail to do so, they face deportation.

Practitioners complain of a constant sense of underlying uncertainty, which undermines the students' ability to concentrate on school, become adjusted to life in their new surroundings and to plan for the future. This is why employers have consistently called for

³ Cf. for a culturally-sensitive view of the challenges faced by migrants in small and medium-sized enterprises (SME): Scharrer et al., 2012.

⁴ Cf. for documentation with practical tips on preparing young refugees for the challenges of an apprenticeship: Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung München, 2014.

a guarantee that asylum seekers who have not attained recognition as a refugee or another form of secure residential status will be able to remain at least for three years' training plus an additional 2 years as qualified workers, the so-called 3+2 rule. In practice, this principle has – after much criticism of restrictive policy on the part of the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior (responsible for issuing permits enabling UMs to begin apprenticeships via the Aliens Offices at local level) – been conceded (Industrie- und Handelskammern in Bayern., n.d.).

There is an ongoing need for access to good quality language teaching starting as early as possible after arrival in the country. Professionals argue that *learning German is the key to integration* and essential even for those asylum-seekers whose prospects of remaining are uncertain. They need to lead their everyday lives in Germany; language skills are essential for this and even in the case of removal, knowledge of German may well be regarded as a recognised skill in the home region.

Social participation is a valuable dimension in developing a sense of belonging. Here, the voluntary sector is of great importance. One of the striking facts about the influx of refugees from 2014 onwards has been the degree of civil society engagement. Rural areas in particular, with the long established tradition in Germany of people being involved in Clubs (*Vereine*) of all kinds, have provided a basis for community involvement. Whether it is the local choir, music and sports clubs or the local (voluntary) fire service, these spaces allow people to get to know each other and share activities and interests in this broader, interactive context. Good language skills are not necessarily a prerequisite. Particularly for young asylum-seekers, soccer is an ideal way to get to know one another and promote uncomplicated inclusive processes with one's peers (Buntkicktgut, 2021).⁵

Good intermeshing cooperation on the part of local actors at the municipal level is of particular importance. Some cities have much more experience with the development of intercultural policies to prevent conflict between communities and enhance quality of life for minorities than others, e.g. Munich or Nuremberg. Professionals in the social, educational and health sectors in cities like Munich, working in government offices, the welfare and charity sector, grass roots initiatives or campaigning groups, have developed networks over the years and meet regularly in workshops and seminars. This has helped bridge ideological gaps, overcome conflicts and promote a sense of a shared search for practicable, professional solutions to problems. Good, regular communication, as well as mutual respect for differing institutional roles and interests, are essential elements in this.

Structures of the youth service need to be flexible and needs-oriented. This means it is important to implement *transitional structures* for those 18-year olds who have lived in residential units and have to move out into hostels or their own accommodation. They still require counselling on vocational training and jobs as well as support in dealing with the demands of everyday life. The German youth service has good models for promoting independent living for young people who have lived in care. These can be amended for the needs of this target group.

Then there is the need for broad-based *psychotherapeutic support* (for traumatised clients) and training courses and supervision for professionals working with them. These

⁵ Cf. for street football league in Munich set up in the 1990s, specifically for asylum seekers who – at that time – were unable to access the local youth football clubs: <http://buntkicktgut.de/>.

courses should be made available for volunteers as well as the professionally-trained employees. Beyond this, there has been a steep rise in the need for supplementary training for child and adolescent psychiatrists as well as for out-patients departments of psychiatric clinics. The issue here for example is: How do psychiatric professionals deal with asylum seekers who go into psychosis as a result of their experiences during forced migration? Equally important is the need to provide for qualified interpreters who can meet the challenge of therapeutic translation in a crisis-induced context (Bayerisches Zentrum für Transkulturelle Medizin 2016).⁶

In summary, linguistic, social and educational integration processes take time. Helping young people with a refugee background adapt to the needs of the vocational training and job market requires a targeted and well thought-out use of resources, and these should be employed on a sustainable basis. Quite separate from the humanitarian-moral dimension of this commitment, it is a long term "investment" in societal and economic development that will prove to be well worth it.

4 In Conclusion: Germany and Migration Policy for the 21st Century. Quo Vadis?

In this essay, we have examined Germany's stance on migration, looking at the history of German emigration and immigration, the development of asylum policy, programmes for vocational training aimed at young refugees and ancillary forms of support to enhance their social and labour market integration.

There are a number of main tendencies which can be discerned, particularly if we are to consider what may be the way forward for migration in a European context and the future trends. First, we may assume that a greater European coordination of concepts and a more dynamic practice in migration regimes will develop on account of demographic change, the consequences of an ageing society for the economy and the resulting skills shortage in many areas of life – with all of the attendant knock-on effects for the welfare state and for the everyday mechanics of social and civil society cohesiveness.

But in this regard, we are not just talking about Germans getting older on average and living longer – and the according need to fund their long term economic and social security. The dynamics of population change through increased mobility around the planet, the universal need for higher levels of qualification and lifelong learning, urban populations being vastly more varied, all these factors mean that intercultural diversity in all manner of relationships is rapidly becoming a norm.

In other words, there are far more bi- and multi-cultural partnerships and, thus, more "multi-ethnic kids" with a middle-class, better educational background; and they are far less prepared to accept their family members being treated as second-class citizens (Ott, 2020). The ramifications of the global *Black Lives Matter* movement give a presentiment of this new self-awareness and resultant critical vocal protest. The monocultural, "white ethnic German" bastions of economic, social and working world power are thus more likely to be questioned and undermined in the course of the next generation – by more self-confident, better-qualified, professionally successful people of multi-ethnic background in

⁶ Cf. for interpreters service in Bavaria specialising in translation in therapeutic and legal contexts for refugees: Bayerisches Zentrum für Transkulturelle Medizin, 2016.

many walks of life. The urban/urbane creative professions and social media figures, influencers etc. already give an indication of this new, diverse and talented demographic.

This process may well be enhanced by the effects of the culturally-sensitive educational reforms of the last two decades in elementary and primary school education which have been the background to developments described here. This dynamic has, moreover, been boosted by the raft of measures of the last few years enabling language training for, as well as vocational and academic integration of, asylum seekers – with an unprecedented mobilisation of resources to make these younger generation immigrants “fit for labour market purpose”. In this article, we have discussed one aspect of this in the form of the courses aimed at developing language skills, attaining school certificates and promoting vocational training for refugees and “new migrants”.

The end result may well be that, within a generation, German society and the world of work will have become far more diverse at all levels and in virtually all sectors of business and administration. Equally, there could, by contrast, be a massive, “pro-ethnic-purity” backlash in the sense of the policy goals of the populist right wing party *Alternative for Germany* (Alternative für Deutschland – AfD), fighting back against all the tendencies described above. The aim of this movement would be to entrench ethnic German monoculturalism and a latter-day form of German white supremacy. Under present-day circumstances, it is difficult to imagine democratic majorities emerging in modern Germany for this kind of radical xenophobic *volte-face* in mainstream debate and policy-making. But one never knows.

In conclusion, we thus return to the role Germany is playing and will play in the future. The Merkel years, which came to an end in autumn 2021, were characterised by an awareness of Germany’s international mediating role as a constructive member of international organisations. This has entailed commitment in funding, professional engagement and support of a spirit of international cooperation to solve the challenges facing the planet in the 21st century, of which the constructive solution of complex, intermeshed migration issues is but one dimension.

One of the most difficult of these policy threads will be the harmonisation of migration policies across Europe – entailing the various target groups of expert/academic, labour, refugee, family reunion, educational, elderly migrants and many more. The disparate interests and diverse national migration traditions within Europe will continue to prove hard to reconcile with one another, Eastern and Western Europe tending to pull in different directions. Germany can aim to be a voice and actor advocating constructive social and human rights-oriented solutions within the frame of an open European migration policy toward those from third states.

Though not within the scope of this article, paths of European migration policy development have been given a new dimension with the waves of forced migration set loose by Russia’s attack upon the Ukraine and the resulting exodus of millions of Ukrainian citizens and other inhabitants into southern and western Europe.

We may, finally, conclude that German migration and refugee policy has often been and remains ambiguous. On the one hand, asylum seekers with little chance of recognition face a harsh regime-restricting access to society and resources which might enable integration – they are often set on a trajectory toward removal. On the other hand, immigrants with a prospect of remaining are given chances. It is in the areas of social,

educational, vocational and labour market integration of newly-arrived migrants and refugees that, in recent years, meaningful steps forward have been taken and the resources made available for long-term integration processes. In these areas, Germany has shown a readiness for the creation of innovative parameters to enable dynamic empowerment of the latest generation of "new immigrants".

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