

# **“Refugees in German Cities: Local responsibilities and universal access under conditions of protest and inclusive actions in the civil society”**

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## **Abstract**

As numbers of refugees have been increasing in Germany during the last two years especially big cities with a growing population as Hamburg, Munich or Berlin are facing severe problems to afford housing, education and necessary administrative support. On the one hand such difficulties encouraged changes in the perspectives of responsible actors in local policies and the civil society: We recognize a new sensibility referring to the localization of provisional housing, institutional practices and in the acceptance of civil engagement. On the other hand creatively supporting groups in the context of refugee camps and neighborhoods as well as minded politicians and administrative actors are confronted with open or hidden protest, led by fears of decreasing real estate values, strangers in neighborhoods and schools or eroding Christian culture and democratic principles. Since the growing movement of PEGIDA in Dresden and other cities in Eastern Germany these protest groups become a political voice and seem to influence in different ways the civic and policy discourse on recent immigration.

The presentation discusses on the example of different German cities the impact of immigration during last years, administrative, civil, legal and political practices on different special levels and discuss challenges of inclusive action in European “arrival cities” (Saunders).

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## 1. Asylum seekers in Germany and gaps between national decisions and duties on the level of federal lands and municipalities

Data from OECD (2014) show for Germany an increase from yearly nearly 45.000 people in average between the years 2009 and 2012, to 65.000 people in 2012 and 110.000 in 2013. In 2013 it was the largest number of asylum seekers in all OECD countries, most of them originating in the Russian Federation, Serbia and Kosovo and Syria. Additional Data from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), 2015) show that the numbers of asylum seekers in Germany is still growing and only few of them are accepted with the recognition of their “need of protection” (see table 1). Without an accepted status asylum seekers have to apply again with legal assistance or to live illegally in Germany or to find a way to reach another country.

Table 1: The development of asylum seekers in Germany from 2011 to 2014

Year	Total Abs.	First Application (%)	Decisions	Accepted %	Rejected <sup>1</sup> %	Formal Decision <sup>2</sup>
2011	53.347	85,7	43.362	22,3	54,7	23,0
2012	77.651	83,1	61.826	27,7	49,7	22,6
2013	127.023	86,3	80.978	24,9	38,5	36,7
2014	202.834	85,3	128.911	31,5	33,4	35,2

Source: BAMF 2015b: 1

The spatial distribution of asylum seekers in Germany is regulated with the so called “Königsteiner Schlüssel”, defining yearly percentages of asylum seekers for every federal land, in relation to the development of its population and tax income. Asylum seekers arrive wherever they can and become distributed to federal lands after their first registration. Like in other European cities near to national borders with harbours, airports, railway facilities, highways and high percentages of immigrant population, working as a social network, German cities of this kind receive also more arriving

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<sup>1</sup> These rejections are based on not acceptable reasons for the application due to German legal regulations.

<sup>2</sup> This means refusal due to the responsibility of another country according to the Dublin III-rules, applicant’s withdrawal or negative decision of a second application.

asylum seekers. This is the case in the three German city states Hamburg, Berlin and Bremen, but also in bigger cities with characteristics mentioned above, but it remains hidden in the average data for the federal land (see table 2).

Table 2: Asylum applicants in German federal lands and their “Königstein”-rate in 2014

Land	Applications		“Königstein”-rate
	Abs.	%	%
Baden-Württemberg	16.482	9,5	12,9
Bavaria	16.482	14,8	15,2
Berlin	10.375	6,0	5,0
Brandenburg	4.906	2,8	3,0
Bremen	2.222	1,3	0,9
Hamburg	5.705	3,3	2,6
Hesse	12.536	7,2	7,3
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	4.418	2,6	2,0
Lower Saxony	15.416	8,9	9,4
Northrhine-Westphalia	40.046	23,1	21,2
Rhineland-Palatinate	8.716	5,0	4,8
Saarland	2.564	1,5	1,2
Saxony	6.030	3,5	5,1
Saxony-Anhalt	5.978	3,5	2,9
Schleswig-Holstein	7.032	4,1	3,4
Thuringia	4.867	2,8	2,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>173.072</b>	100	100

Source: BAMF 2015a: 16.

Providing necessary institutional and welfare infrastructure (housing, clothing, hygienic facilities, food, health service and translation) for the period of registration as an asylum seeker and the organization of transfer to other federal lands for those who exceed the actual distribution rate of each federal land is the task of the lands first reception institutions. If they are overcrowded, the federal institutions make the transfer to municipalities even if the registration is not completed. At the moment the

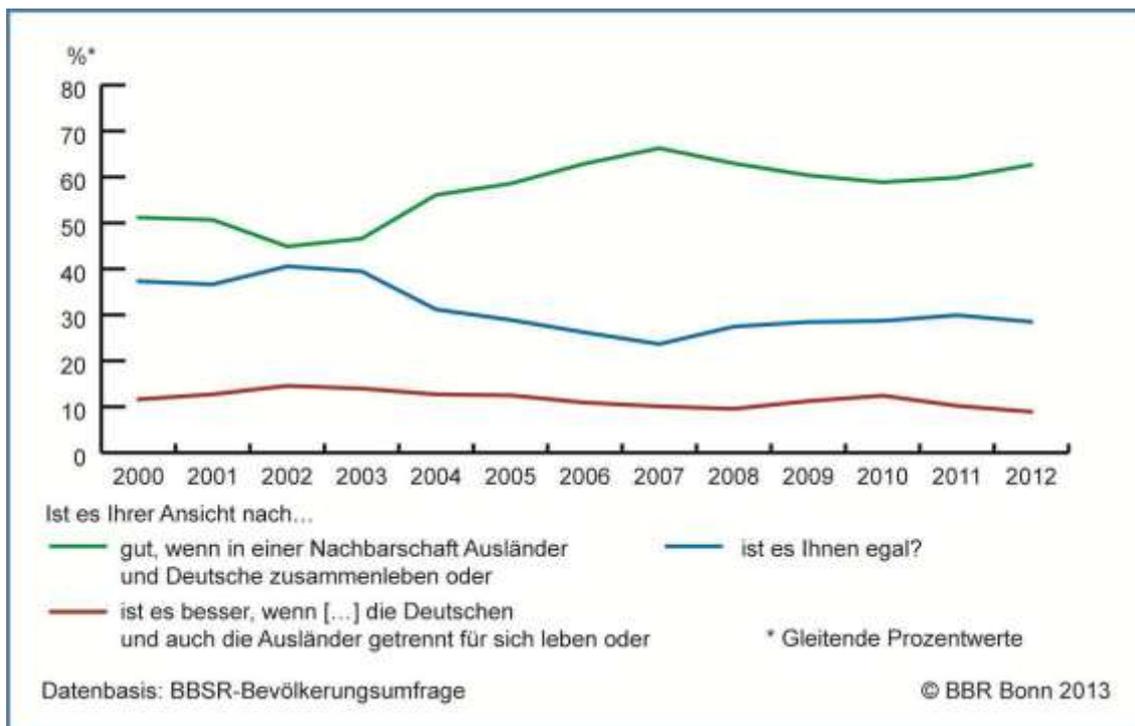
experts from the German Cities Association (Deutscher Städtetag) complain about this fact and assume a lack of about 40.000 places in federal receiving institutions. Because the temporary hosting and the responsibility for those administratively distributed to each federal land for the whole period until a final decision upon their asylum application is quite expensive, municipalities and federal lands ask for financial help from national authorities, but this was not yet successful as expected. The problem of this distribution system is the fact that it based only on categories of the federal lands and does not respect already existing situations of immigrants in the localities where they need to be accepted for often long lasting periods. As a result, data provided by BAMF as the national authority in charge, show only the development of applicants in Hamburg, Berlin and Bremen as city states with the status of a federal land, but not in other cities of Germany and rural localities of Germany. This national institution restricts its responsibility in the existing legal frame on documentations of their decisive work accepting or refusing asylum applications according to legal regulations and collects no information about life conditions of immigrants and asylum seekers in the different hosting localities. Authorities of federal lands are obliged to coordinate the regional distribution of asylum seekers and to provide financing if municipalities are not able to cope themselves with the legal responsibilities for housing, education, work and health services. But finally it remains the difficult task for most of the municipalities affected to manage this humanitarian challenge financially, politically, socially and culturally.

## **2. Local life conditions of asylum seekers in Germany**

As the national and most of the federal German authorities do not provide any systematic information about this topic it is difficult to discuss it based on empirical data. But also in urban and regional scientific research efforts to explore this important issue in a comparative manor are almost poor. Migration studies do not differentiate between immigration in general and asylum seekers, so that we cannot know, which immigrant group entered the host country as an asylum applicant under which legal

regulations. As Doug Saunders (2011) pointed out in his study of 16 megacities with huge numbers of incoming refugees, they are as more successful in integrating them quickly in the host cities and profiting from their arrival as more as they are recognized as a positive opportunity for further development (see also Ipsen et al. 2005). In contrary, cities which try to defend themselves against foreign influx, suffer under costs and insecurities created by long-term excluded immigrants. From this point of view it is a positive perspective, that German citizens present themselves open minded towards living together with foreigners in their neighbourhood (see figure 1), even if a majority seems not be confronted with such an international spatial reality (see figure 2).

Figure 1: Opinions of a representative German sample towards internationally mixed neighbourhoods<sup>3</sup>



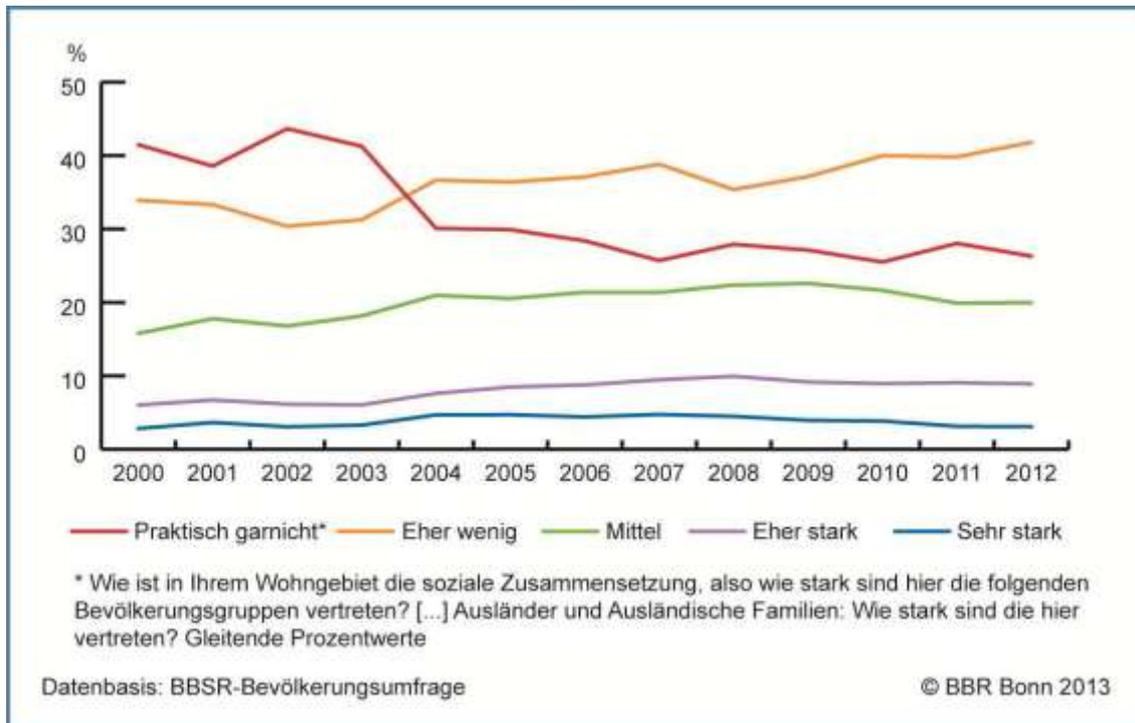
Source: Sturm&Körner-Blätgen 2015:13

The same question in big cities with high percentages of immigrants would show even more acceptance for such social mixtures because they became a part of daily life.

<sup>3</sup> The green line indicates acceptance, the blue line shows those percentages, who don't care about this topic and the brown line those who opt for ethnic segregation.

Contrasting positions are characteristic for small German cities and even bigger ones in Eastern Germany, where the chance to experience urban life together with foreign people is still limited.

Figure 2: Perceived presence of foreigners in the housing district<sup>4</sup>



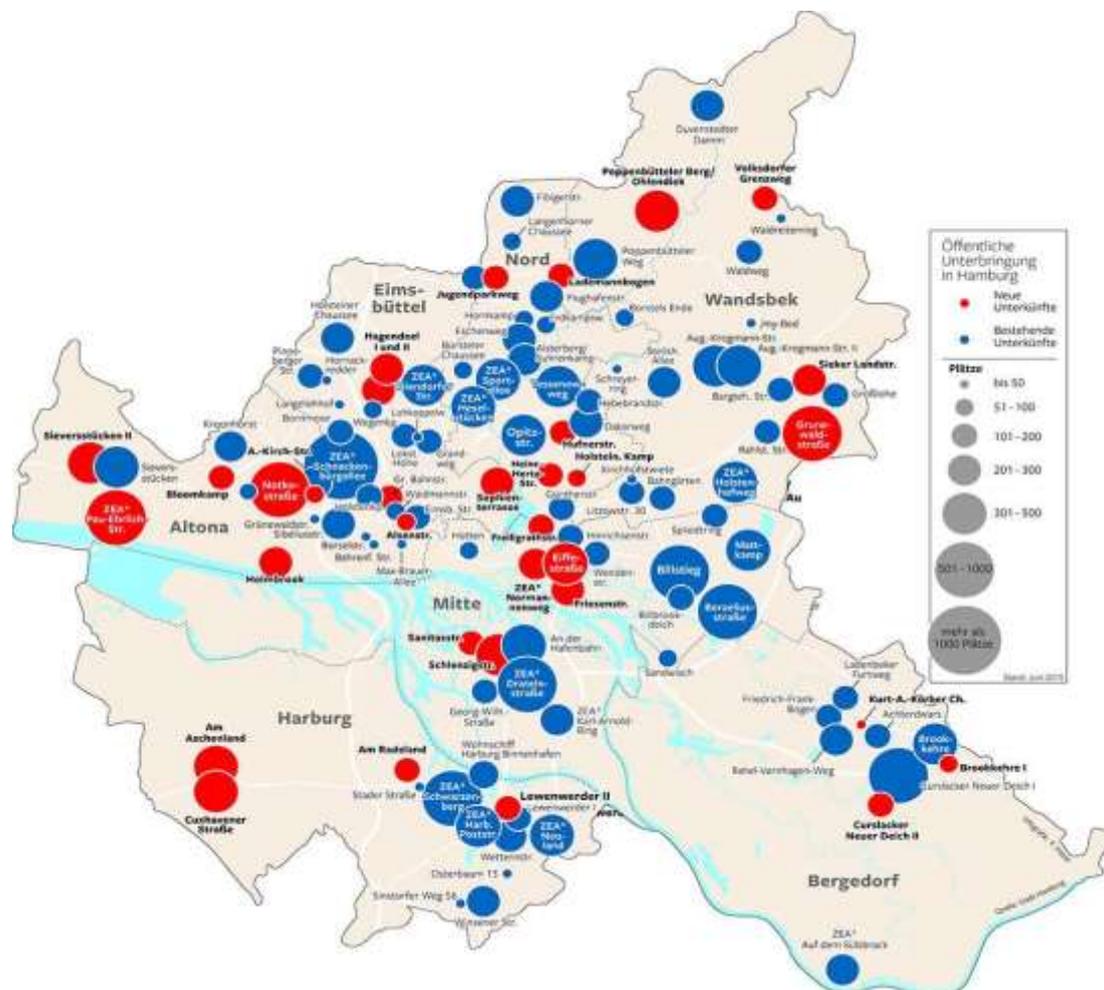
Source: Sturm&Körner-Blätgen 2015:13

But foreigners in the public opinion are mostly not perceived as asylum seekers. We recognize this difference in regionally different reactions on the arrival of refugees which becomes visible in their housing areas. Even if they live in normal residential buildings people discover them as homes of asylum applicants. A big part of the German population expresses an open minded attitude and tries to create a welcome atmosphere for the newcomers: They offer language courses, contribute as voluntary doctors, invite refugees for dinner in their home, collect necessary items, accompany to and translate in public institutions, organize sport, children play groups and other leisure activities. Some people decide to offer refugees a place to live in their private

<sup>4</sup> The red line indicates 'not at all', yellow 'rather little', green 'medium', violet 'rather strong' and blue 'very strong'.

homes, independently of their political orientation and ethnic relationship. But since many German municipalities are no more capable to host everybody in residential buildings different kinds of locations become relevant for existing housing needs: Improvising practices started with transformations of empty buildings, formerly used for sports, education, military or economic purposes like hotels. During the last month many cities were forced to create temporary housing for refugees in tents in order to cope with the still growing number of newcomers. By this way housing opportunities for refugees became more and more unusual in comparison to domestic residences and were distributed in the whole city.

Figure 3: Housing places for refugees in Hamburg in summer 2015



Source: <http://www.abendblatt.de/bin/scr-205454079.jpg>. Access: 12.07.2015

Figure 3 gives an overview about existing and planned housing places for asylum seekers in Hamburg. Blue dots are existing residences and red ones need to be realized as soon as possible. In July 2015 Hamburg had 18.819 sleeping places in 86 sites. The federal minister for social affairs expects to need 9.000 more places on 38 sites including enlargements of existing facilities. Until the end of 2015 probably only 4.000 places can be finished, which means that ca. 3.000 places will be lacking. The dimensions of the dots show the number of places on each site from less than 50 to more than 1.000. These data make clear, that housing for new immigrants is a difficult challenge for the responsible administration as well as for the civil society. The problem becomes visible nearly in each neighbourhood and needs to be confronted. 'Not in my backyard' is no more acceptable even if people in rich districts went successfully to court against places for asylum seekers with the argument that such uses are not tolerable in a legally fixed 'pure residential area' because of risks for a fruitful development of their real estate value. But the district administration started already to change the legal regulation for the respective area and after that the existing welcoming initiative will have a chance to support the poor newcomers with their prepared convincing activities. This example shows opposite reactions in the civil society towards the presence of refugees in urban space.

Much more critical and dangerous are protests against residences for asylum seekers in German cities and villages, where houses were burnt and politicians forced to resign from their position as mayor due to violent comments in social media or oral threats at the telephone. Most of such violent actions happened in Eastern Germany in locations with very few foreign residences and in very conservative areas of Western Germany. They seem to be encouraged by right wing political groups, which try to remain hidden in larger protest movements like PEGIDA. Violent reactions on recent immigration in the civil society show that there are political, social and spatial tasks to be practically recognized in this thematic field. They cannot be ignored with the hope of compensation through welcome activities. We need to understand also scientifically much better what goes on in the countries of origin, under which subjective conditions people decided to flee, how they can be hosted in a humanitarian way in which

European countries and locations, and what they need to integrate themselves as quick as possible in the educational systems and labour markets in the arrival places. First steps are done by young European scholars (see Kreichauf 2014 and Belloni 2014) but need to be continued and enlarged with international comparative studies.

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