

POLICY MEMO

**Refugee Integration: A Local Approach
on Global Migration Influx**

Franziska Fischer



Refugee Integration: A Local Approach on Global Migration Influx

Franziska Fischer, PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Victoria

1. Executive Summary

Summary

The influx of refugees since 2015 in Western societies has unearthed difficulties on the national and international level to develop coherent and collaborative policies to organize the people and the burdens for the countries and communities. The situation is often distorted by the media and political voices have emerged that present xenophobic and nationalistic solutions. The leading administrations struggle to address problems and concerns of the people on a national level. Resentment and hostilities towards refugees are rising that give momentum to populist political voices. The uncertainty by the public, facilitated through the media, is harnessed by political actors to steer the political direction towards the right.

Discussion

This failure to successfully address the situation results in a legal limbo for the refugees, in which there are unable to integrate and participate successfully in their new community. While the political administration is concerned with organization on a macro-level, the people on the micro-level are left waiting, often for years. It affects the communities, as the paralyzed refugee groups in their accommodations are often perceived as unwilling to integrate and participate. A gap between refugees and the host society is growing.

Recommendation

In order to address and alleviate this gap, which is identified through the analysis of predominant media channels and political rhetoric as well as voting behavior, this policy memo recommends the installment of Community Outreach Groups on a local level that present the framework to develop and implement

policies in a local level. The groups should consist of members of the community, refugees, and representatives of the state. Their aim is the successful integration of refugees in the host society by addressing problems and concerns on both sides, as well as unearthing commonalities on which integration strategies can be build on. Through the successes and failures of the local Community Outreach Groups, national policies might be developed at a later stage.

2. The Policy Memo

Background

The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR reports a dire picture. The world is witnessing its highest level of displaced people since the beginning of recording, counting 68.5 million people around the globe, who were forced to leave their homes. 25.4 million fall under the definition of 'refugees', and over half of these refugees are under the age of 18¹. The influx of refugees in European and North American states, such as Germany and Canada, has been dubbed a 'crisis' for the Western Society. However, the majority of the refugees is hosted by countries outside the Western hemisphere. The crisis of the influx lies elsewhere. It is the bureaucratic backlog in countries such as Germany, and to a different extent in Canada, to organize and facilitate the arrival of refugees which turns this influx into a crisis. Not for the countries, but rather for the people seeking safety who are now often caught in a limbo between fleeing and arriving. This situation is distorted by media channels and integration is hindered through hostilities and resentment by hosting populations and the rise of right-wing political voices.

¹ United Nations; UNHCR, Figures at a Glance; <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



University
of Victoria

Centre for
Global Studies



University
of Victoria

Political
Science



EUROPE
CANADA
NETWORK

The European Union support for the production of publications does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflect the views only of the authors, and cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Both the political leaders of Germany and Canada expressed a pro-refugee rhetoric. Justin Trudeau's Twitter account on January 28th of 2017 spoke out for multiculturalism and diversity. Angela Merkel's call to refugees during the German summer press conference, August 31st, 2015 inviting all those seeking refuge into Germany, resulted shortly after in the opening of the borders for refugees, and coined the German 'Willkommenskultur' (Welcome culture). While both statements reflect the respective core values of their countries, such as the concept of 'multiculturalism' in Canada, which is enshrined in the constitution² and 'solidarity' in Germany, which is established through the European Union ideological framework encoded in the Lisbon Treaty³, they failed to establish a coherent and encompassing attitude in the public.

This divergence is partly built on the political approach to the influx. The political discussion is focused on the bureaucratic backlog and on issues of distributions of people, and burdens coming with the influx of people on a macrolevel, rather than developing immediate and targeted policy solutions that organize the limbo of the waiting people and facilitate integration into the host societies on a micro level. While there is a need to address the bureaucratic and administrative issues on a national and international level, parallelly targeting local and regional integration issues is a crucial step to alleviate the rising hostilities and resentments towards refugees. These resentments have the potential to transform into violent outbursts in the civil society, as well as driving forward right-wing populist movements as well as political agendas. Therefore, there is a need to implement micro-level policy changes that facilitate integration and participation of refugees in their host societies. These policy implementations ought to be informed and inspired

by local and regional context and needs, and driven by community members themselves.

Methodology/ Data

The findings and recommendations are based upon an analysis of predominant media channels in Germany, such as 'Handelsblatt', 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung', 'Die Süddeutsche', and 'Bild'. In Canada The Toronto Star, 'The Globe and Mail', 'La Presse', and 'The National Post'. These media channels illustrate and represent the problems arising with the influx of refugees since 2015 in Germany and Canada, as well as on an international level. These channels form a major source for the building of public opinion and often fuel the resentment within the host society. The problems identified through media is juxtaposed with right-wing political rhetoric such as Pegida and the AFD that presents solutions for these problems that go against integration.

Key findings

The problems outlined by the media, as well as the solutions portrayed by right-wing political narrative both refers to a national or even international picture that disregards the realities of smaller communities with the nation-state that provide the context for different and more nuanced problems and concerns with influx of the refugee population.

The media tends to represent big events such as the Cologne sexual assault case or attacks on the Christmas Market in Berlin, or the attack in a shopping mall in Munich and connect the safety issues of our modern times directly with the influx of refugees. A nuanced and differentiated analysis of these events and the relation and causation through the influx of refugees is missing or taken for granted.

The media takes little consideration the daily lives of communities that host refugees and the struggles, as well as the potentials within these micro-environments. They suggest hypothetical threats to security, to the welfare state and to the western culture rather than representing the realities of different groups within the nation-state and representing the variety of identities and cultural

2 Canada; A Consolidation of the Constitution Act 1867 to 1982; Department of Justice, Canada; Consolidated as of January 1, 2013; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Section 27, Multicultural Heritage. See also: Kymlicka, Will; Three Forms of Group-differentiated Citizenship in Canada; In S. Benhabib (Ed.) Democracy and Difference (pp 153-170); Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press; 1996.

3 Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon; Lisbon on December 13, 2007; Published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ C 115/47) of 9 May 2008; TFEU, Article 222 (4).



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



University
of Victoria

Centre for
Global Studies



University
of Victoria

Political
Science



EUROPE
CANADA
NETWORK

nuances within different refugee groups, as well as in the host societies.

While the Merkel administration has addressed the unique character of events such as in Cologne, Berlin and Munich, other voices in Germany connected all incidents to a common cultural heritage that justifies such a behavior. Frauke Petry, the former leader of the populist right wing party AFD discounted this in an interview ‘the New Yorker’ as a “liberal tendency to suppress politically inconvenient truths.”⁴ In Petry’s opinion, her political opponents “absolutely avoid acknowledging the factors of illegal migration and open borders in these attacks.”⁵ According to Petry, all the attacks were connected to social and cultural heritage. She argued that “[t]hese people coming into Germany are used to being in completely different social circumstances.”⁶ This narrative is reproduced within the public opinion and form the foundation for many violent incidents against refugees and their accommodation. The label refugee is thus constructed on the premise of a collective identity of a group, which does not fit in the cultural sphere of the Western nation-states. The identity that is connected to the label ‘refugee’ triggers therefore an emotional response in the public opinion, that is mainly coined by mistrust, fear and anger, or at the least skepticism.

Recommendations

A large-scale solution for the alleviations of burdens, problems and concerns, arisen with the influx of refugees in European and North American nation-states at this moment in time is unlikely so succeed in addressing the nuanced differentiation of the problems and concerns experienced on a micro-level within local communities. Policies need to address the problems and concerns of communities on a micro level and need to present flexibility to adjust to context from case to case, as well as to change within the communities.

Therefore, this policy memo recommends not a specific policy but rather the construction of a framework through which in a local community level policy can be developed and implemented by the same people. This memo thus recommends the regional and local administrations to build Community Outreach Groups, consisting of five to ten community members from different sectors of the community, as well as up to five advisors from the state level, depending on the size of the community, and five to ten representatives of the refugee community. In case of language barriers, translators should be facilitated.

These Community Outreach Groups are recommended to meet once or more per month in order to unearth local concerns and desires from the community members, as well as concerns and desires from the refugee community. This will suggest common grounds between refugees and community members and allow for the constructive development of strategies to address concerns and realize desires from both sides. Strategies could range from language lessons for the refugees to collaborations during local events such as markets, as well as rulebooks and norms established to specifically cater to the local situation.

The representatives of the state are recommended to facilitate and organize the meetings, mediate during conflict and are invited to make suggestions from a macro-level perspective in order to ensure no conflict with state-level efforts and policies, as well as the legal immigration procedures and asylum processes.

The state-level representatives are recommended to meet collectively twice per year to develop national and international policy changes according to the micro-level policy developments and their successes or failures. The state representatives ought to learn from the differentiated and nuanced local solutions to problems and concerns to facilitate the development of national policies. This inductive approach will ensure communication between regional and national political administrations, it will more likely succeed in alleviating problems and concerns as the peo-

4 Meaney, Thomas; *The new Star of Germany's far right, Frauke Petry is a mother, a scientist, and the leader of the country's most successful nationalist phenomenon since the Second World War*; The New Yorker, Profiles; October 3, 2016.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



University
of Victoria

Centre for
Global Studies



University
of Victoria

Political
Science



EUROPE
CANADA
NETWORK

ple themselves are invested in the process, and it has the potential to facilitate integration of refugees, and thereby address the resentment and hostilities that are often directed towards a grey mass rather than the individual refugee groups within the community. It will thereby put the distorted representation of the media into perspective and allow for a more educated voting behavior that is not manipulated by xenophobic and nationalistic solutions.

3. Key References

Canada; A Consolidation of the Constitution Act 1867 to 1982; Department of Justice, Canada; Consolidated as of January 1, 2013; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Section 27, Multicultural Heritage.

Kymlicka, Will; *Three Forms of Group-differentiated Citizenship in Canada*; In S. Benhabib (Ed.) **Democracy and Difference** (pp 153-170); Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press; 1996.

Meaney, Thomas; *The new Star of Germany's far right, Frauke Petry is a mother, a scientist and the leader of the country's most successful nationalist phenomenon since the Second World War*; **The New Yorker**, Profiles; October 3, 2016.

Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon; Lisbon on December 13, 2007; Published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ C 115/47) of 9 May 2008; TFEU, Article 222 (4). United Nations; UNHCR, Figures at a Glance; <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> [16th of May, 2019]

FRANZISKA FISCHER

Franziska Fischer currently pursues her Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Victoria in the faculty of Political Science under the supervision of Dr. Oliver Schmidtke and in collaboration with the Centre for Global Studies. She successfully balances her academic career and the arrival of her first child in January 2019. Franziska holds an MA joint degree in Erasmus Mundus Global Studies from the University of Leipzig and the University of Wroclaw with an additional research semester at Dalhousie University in Halifax Canada, and a BA in North American Politics and International Law from the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich and Bishops University in Quebec, Canada. Additionally, she has worked with the non-profit organization 'Lifting Hand International' in Serres, Greece in a Community Center for Refugees, managing and conducting the German language and the Music program. In context to her endeavors to connect refugees and local communities, she has established the network 'Share the world Project' in 2018, through which she aimed to give different voices a space to be heard and different narratives to be exchanged.

EUCAnet.org: Contact info@eucanet.org
Twitter @CdnEurDialogue
Facebook CanadaEuropeDialogue

Website: www.eucanet.org



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



University
of Victoria

Centre for
Global Studies



University
of Victoria

Political
Science



EUROPE
CANADA
NETWORK

The European Union support for the production of publications does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflect the views only of the authors, and cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.