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Refugee crisis in Germany Sept 2015

Indeed, incredible things are happening in these days. You may have seen the pictures of thousands of refugees walking along the highways towards Budapest and on the railway tracks towards northern Europe. Yesterday the cross-border trains were halted because trains were overcrowded with refugees and no control was possible. Most refugees come from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia fleeing from Boko Haram Northern Nigeria, yet 40% also come from the Western Balkan: Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania – in particular Roma & Sinti and Albanians frustrated by corruption and lack of development in their country. Most of the refugees want to move to Germany and Sweden that appear to be most receptive to refugees, whereas Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and UK have been very resistant.

Two weeks ago, the exhibition hall of our regional town Sinsheim (population 12,000) was converted into a large sleeping hall on short notice. Within 3 days 1,000 refugees found temporal housing – during the next days their number increased to 1,500.

When the first group arrived, I helped out as translator for Arabic and was moved by the encounters: Syrians arriving with nothing but a plastic bag containing a sweater and a few papers. Infected feet covered with scars and terrible stories of their flight... Several of our staff have been helping as volunteers to give out food and clothing, helping with children or teaching German.

This year 1.5 million new refugees are expected in our country alone. In general they are received well by the population although there have been a few attacks by right wing activists, especially in Eastern Germany and there were a few arson attacks on shelters in preparation for the arrival of refugees.

So let me give you some background information to these unique development.

1. Compassion since Nazi times

During Nazi times millions of Jews, political activists and Christians were persecuted and fled Germany. The German nation still has a guilt feeling because of our political past: it feels obliged to help refugees - and has a long history of this:

After WWII, 9 million Germans were expelled from the Eastern part of the country (which became Poland and Soviet Union) and had to be integrated into West Germany and GDR.

2. Very low birth-rate in Germany

Around 1970 the birth-rate dropped sharply. It was the times of student revolution when women went for a professional career instead of child-raising. In the meantime, German women give birth to only 1.05 children (on average) – one of the lowest number in the world (immigrant women have more babies, so the overall birth-rate is 1.25 children per women), yet 2.1 children are needed to balance the death rate.

Since 1971 more people have been dying in Germany than being born – becoming the first country worldwide with this characteristics. Only through the immigration of 2.3 million “Russian Germans” from Soviet Union, 1.5 million from Poland, 430,000 from Romania, 100,000 from Czech Republic, 95,000 from Yugoslavia etc. between 1975–1992 has the population remained balanced.

Demographic specialists expect that even under the (optimistic) assumption of annual net influx of 140'000, the population will decline in the next 25 years by 15% (from 82 million to 72 million) – and many more will then be retirees than people of working age.

3. Social security system in Germany:

After WWII, the cities were in ruins and all assets lost and millions of immigrants had to be supported, so the social security system was established as a future refunding system – and still is today. Each employee pays 9.4% of his salary into the compulsory pension scheme (DRV) and the employer adds the same amount. This money is then immediately paid out to retirees of today. Thus, no interest is accrued but you earn the expectation that the next generation will pay for your pension (“Generationenvertrag” = “Generational contract”).

This system works, as long as there is a growing labour force. In the next 20 years, however, the number of pensioners will double and those of working age will decline by 40%. Thus, many immigrants are needed to keep the system alive.

4. Turkish immigration in the 1960ies

In the 1960 the population did not catch up with the labour needs so that 2 million Turkish workers (often from East Anatoly) were invited to work in the assembly lines and on the construction sites. It was expected that they would work just for a few years and then return to their home places so that little efforts were made towards their integration. It came differently; they brought their fiancées to Germany and started a family. Many of their children are still only marginally integrated into society –some of these frustrated young man nowadays move to Syria and fight for IS.

5. European Union (“Schengen Raum”)

European states have grown together: today, there is a free flow of goods and people without any border controls. Every EU citizen has the same personal and labour rights in any EU country. Once you have a Schengen visa, you can freely move around. As unemployment has sky-rocked in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria during the recent economic crisis, millions of workers have taken up work in Germany – or gone for professional training. This has preference for Europe and Europe has closed the doors from outside the EU. This free movement is now coming under threat as unregistered refugees without any papers have pressed their way into the EU and are travelling anywhere through Europe.

6. **Dublin II Treaty** regulates that a new arrival should file his/her asylum case in the country where he/she enters the EU, i.e. in Hungary. Its authorities have then the obligation to study the case and make a decision on the basis of equal asylum criteria. If there should be too many refugees entering a front state, then the refugees should be distributed within the EU states. However, the system does not work any more: 1. Too many refugees have come to the front states Hungary and Italy; 2. Hungarian police has treated them badly in order to discourage new arrivals. 3. The authorities have not applied the joint criteria; 4. Refugees have overcome the border and are moving through the country. 5. They are choosing not to be registered in Hungary but moving unilaterally on to Austria and Germany 6. The Hungarian government was glad to be rid of them. 7. Many European countries do not want to accept any refugees so European solidarity breaks down. 8. Most refugees want to go to Germany and Sweden – should the other nations pay for their integration, if they do not accept refugees. This is one of the issues under discussion at the moment.

7. Regional differences within Germany

After Germany unification in 1990, the transformation process in Eastern Germany has been difficult and many feel like the unification losers. Unemployment is still around 8-11% (compared to 4-8% in Western Germany); there are few job opportunities and many young people have moved to the urban regions (in West Germany).

In the past there were few foreigners in GDR and still the percentage of expats is very low in the East, thus people are not accustomed to meeting foreigners. On the contrary, some feel that foreigners are taking their jobs (although many East Germans would not do for these lowly paid jobs anyway).

In the South of Germany, unemployment is much lower than in Northern Germany, in urban areas lower than in the countryside. Immigrants in general want to move to the larger cities. Thus immigrants tend to concentrate in the larger cities in the Southwest where already now a large proportion of the population is immigrant.

8. Federal Republic

Germany is a federal republic so that each federal state has its own laws, regulations, police force etc., so that there are some local differences. Regarding refugees, each federal state has one central welcoming centre, where the new arrivals are registered. Then the refugees are housed in apartment blocks, pensions etc. throughout the country till their case is heard and decided whether the person obtains (a) refugee status (any one from Syria, Iraq receives this status; yet hardly anyone from the Balkan), (b) is not accepted but will not be deported on humanitarian grounds (i.e. any youth and many from the Balkan) or (c) is repatriated (which rarely happens). Before the hearing the persons are usually housed in a regional housing compound thereafter in a flat that the local municipality has to provide.

9. Length of the hearing process

It is intended that refugees receive their hearing within 3-5 months, yet at the moment more than 240,000 cases are pending and it may take up to a year till they receive their hearing.

Only after the decision the refugee will receive German classes and integration courses and can take up a job – before this they are condemned to idleness, illegal business or subject to exploitation.

10. Financial incentives

According to German law (AsylbLG) a refugee is entitled to pocket money for his personal expenses of 143 Euro/month for a single (resp. 252 Euro for a couple plus 82-111 Euro per child depending on its age) plus money for food (unless food is provided) of 216 Euro/month for a single, (resp. 390 Euro for a couple plus 130 – 194 Euro per child), plus free housing, free heating, household equipment, furniture and medical treatment.

Thus a family with 4 children gets 650 Euro pocket money plus 1000 Euro for food plus free housing, which is often more than a German worker earns – not to speak of the average income in the refugees' country of origin (i.e. Albania, Pakistan). In Denmark and Sweden, the financial support is even higher. Thus there is an economic incentive for moving to Germany, even if you ultimately do not get a refugee status.

11. Rumours

In the refugee camps in Turkey, Syria, Northern Iraq rumours are spreading that Germany would welcome any refugee with open arms, would build a house for him and give him lots of money, so that many thousands are on their way – especially as hope for an end of the fighting and opportunity for a return to their home is dwindling. This weekend again 40,000 refugees are expected.

12. Unaccompanied minors

A special case are juniors arriving without their parents; they are under special protecting and mustn't be deported. Usually, they are placed under a guardian and living family groups (together with a social worker), they will immediately

go to school or receive professional training – and often they later bring in in their families. Because of their protected status and (weak personality) they are often approached by gangs, drug dealers, etc. and go astray.

The administrative procedure

Each day several thousands new refugees are crossing the border into Germany, usually illegally – as there are open borders within the EU. Upon their arrival the refugee is assigned to one of the 16 Federal states (according to its population size and economic strength) which needs to take care of them. Each Federal state has one or several central living compounds for Asylum seeker and central refugee offices that does the paper work and decides about the case. Usually, the refugees are brought by bus to these central housing complexes (and its extension centres, one of which in Sinsheim) where their names, place of origin and personal data are taken.

This process may take up to 8 weeks; then the refugee is assigned to a county which is then responsible for the care (and receives therefore 670 Euro per month and person from the Federal government). Nowadays the local government rents apartment blocks, sports halls, barracks, empty warehouses and the refugee needs to await his/her hearing before a panel where explains his reasons and circumstances for flight. Then the panel will make a decision whether or not to entitle official asylum status. Syrians usually are accepted; Roma from Albania have little chance to be accepted. Overall some 50% of the refugees were accepted in the last year.

Many of those not accepted, however, will not be deported on humanitarian grounds: i.e. any unaccompanied minor and many families with children and they will also receive social benefits. In the past years only very few persons were actually deported. The time for their hearing should be within 3 months – but has dragged on to 12 and more months because of the sheer numbers.

This is very unsatisfactory and puts high stress/uncertainty on the refugees. In the hearing before the panel the refugee must name all reasons and the decision is made on this basis. They cannot add more reasons afterwards (i.e. that in meantime they have converted to Christianity. Women often do not dare to expose that they have been raped in Iraq or during their flight, before males on the panel; thus those reasons cannot be added afterwards.

Only after their acceptance as refugees they can apply for work and earn some money, receive German classes and integration courses. At this time the government will provide a flat (or older house) for them.

In summary, the German government is taking care of bed, food, clothing, pocket money, medical care, etc. – there are no shacks on open squares, no illegal settlements in the forest, no need for soup kitchen or handing out of cloths.

Yet during the first year refugees are condemned to idleness (or illegal activities i.e. drugs trafficking to earn some money, stealing, illegal work etc.). This is our chance for private activities of churches: providing German classes, sports activities, meeting

places, internet access, coffee shops, outings, inviting them to church, helping with trauma relief, translation, etc.

DMG & churches

What does the refugee crisis mean to us (DMG), to churches and mission agencies?

1. Influencing public opinion

The church is God's global family and Christians have been the first activists for globalisation. Christians need to build bridges between different cultures and help each other.

2. Showing compassion

Jesus parable of the Good Samaritan clearly teaches that we need to help people in need in practical ways. A number of our staff helps in practical ways to give out food and clothing, donate warm clothing and household goods, etc. We cannot other but living out the Gospel.

3. We need to **teach mercy and generosity in churches** and in our mission magazines.

4. **Build friendships** – as many are very lonely. They come from relational societies and long for friendships. This is our chance to share God's love.

5. **Missionaries on home assignment** model this during their deputation, visiting the next refugee camp together with their hosts and help them how to build bridges.

6. Welcoming church

Invite refugees to our church – most refugees are very religious and long for spiritual fellowship - provide translation of the church service and afterwards invite them for lunch in your home. Give them a Bible in their mother tongue.

7. Pioneer mission on our doorstep

Many refugees come from our countries of service like Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya - 10% of our DMG missionaries serve among immigrants in Germany. Many more workers are needed and there are a number of platforms for cooperation (i.e. AMIN).

8. DMG is cooperating with a number of partners in refugee/immigrant ministries in Germany and we can facilitate vision trips, short-term placements, internships, long-term placements (provide visa and social security in Germany).

9. Help Evangelical refugees to set up an **immigrant churches** in their mother tongue/trade language and to reach out to other immigrants

10. Reverse mission: Mission back to Europe

The world is watching the refugee crisis and more missionaries will be coming to Europe. Europe has lost the Gospel and we need the external help to reach our generation with the Gospel. Aren't those immigrant churches part of this movement? The percentage of Evangelicals in Germany is below 2%. Many refugees from Africa come from spiritually healthy and rich churches. Some 30 of our DMG missionaries are working cross-culturally in Germany.

11. Diaspora network:

These new nomads are highly mobile and move from one place to the next, staying in contact with their relatives. How to build a ministry team i.e. for Somalis when there are a few workers in Berlin, Amsterdam, London, Nairobi and Toronto? Their culture is probably very different from those living in Mogadishu.

12. Ministry to refugees in the Middle East.

A number of our workers serve refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey etc. providing medical help, food, housing, trauma counselling – and we are able to connect your missionaries with those organisations.

Why do refugees choose Germany as destination (survey by BAMF)

1. As they have already friends and relatives there (social networks)
2. Hope for a job – economic power, lots of jobs, especially in engineering
3. German mentality appeals: order, punctuality, cleanliness appeals to Syrians
4. Feel welcome, especially Angela Merkel: “no upper limit”
5. Rumours among refugees
6. Religious freedom and tolerance
7. Social welfare has little influence on their decision