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Migration in
European History

Klaus J. Bade

Translated by Allison Brown
expulsion. Within a short period of time, for example, 1.8 million Czechs and Slovaks settled in Czechoslovakia in the Sudetenland, after the German populations there had been expelled. In Poland, too, the confiscated land of Germans who had fled or were expelled was quickly redistributed and settled. The population in the new Polish areas had already exceeded 5 million in August 1947. Three million had come from central Poland, another million from the eastern Polish provinces that had been ceded to the USSR; 1 million Poles had already lived there before 1945. These and other migrations to the former German settlement regions in eastern, central and south-eastern Europe led in turn to subsequent migrations in ever-expanding chain reactions. After the immense shifts of populations during the Second World War and owing to the flight and expulsion of the German population, these migrations contributed to a further restructuring of the map of nationalities in eastern Europe during the Cold War.

The final phase in Europe's historic transition from a continent of emigration to one of immigration encompassed the period from the end of the post-war mass migrations to the migratory movements triggered or facilitated by the end of the Cold War. In the history of refugee movements within and to Europe, however, the Second World War represented a twofold break. As previously discussed, it spurred the most immense forced and refugee migrations in European history. Moreover, the war also accelerated the disintegration of the European colonial empires, which sent millions of colonial and post-colonial immigrants and return migrants off to Europe.

Overseas emigration from Europe recovered from the Second World War and regained its momentum. It took up old migration traditions whose networks could be used in the Cold War even for purposes of mass political manipulation. Half a century after the peak of Italian-American mass immigration, the CIA launched a huge campaign in the run-up to the 1948 Italian elections that made use of these still existent or at least revivable transatlantic networks. Americans of Italian descent were called upon to write letters to their relatives in Italy warning them not to vote for the Communists. The result was a flood of an estimated 10 million messages of this kind. They had an extraordinary influence on the elections of 18 April 1948; the Christian Democrats obtained an overwhelming majority, while contrary to expectations the Communists lost almost half their vote.

Until far into the 1960s, the number of European overseas emigrations was still appreciably higher than migrations to Europe from non-European regions. Consequently, Europe had a net loss of 2.7 million inhabitants from 1930 to 1959. Not until the decade of the 1960s did the balance of European migration register slightly in the black (+250,000).
The shift to a continent of immigration then came in the 1970s. Since 1970 there have been significant immigration gains throughout Europe. In 1970–9, the increase was 1.9 million; in 1980–9, it was 1.6 million; and from 1990 to 1995, it was 2.1 million. Gains and losses stood out less in net European migration figures than they did in individual national figures, since transnational migration within Europe outstripped the volume of migration to Europe by far, especially at the time of the major migrant labour movements. However, the most expansive migratory movements of all time that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century took place in non-European spheres, especially the ‘Third World’, only about 5 per cent of which even touched Europe.

Statistics on foreigners in the European realm, which at the end of the twentieth century included 15 European Union (EU) countries plus Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, showed a rise from about 4 million foreigners in 1950 to almost three times that amount (roughly 11 million) in 1970–6. By 1982, the number had increased almost fourfold (about 15 million) and by 1994–5, finally, it reached five times that amount (about 20 million). In the late 1990s, one-third of foreign nationals were from other countries of central, western and northern Europe. At that time they made up about 5 per cent of the total population of the region. This should not be confused with the much larger immigration population that had been naturalized, to varying degrees depending on the country, since the 1950s and whose children were born in the receiving countries. The country with the largest foreign national population in the 1950s in absolute figures was France (1.8 million), followed by a distant West Germany with about 570,000, Belgium with about 370,000 and Austria with about 320,000. There are no reliable figures for Britain for this period. The picture had clearly changed in 1970. At the peak was now West Germany (c.3 million), followed by France (c.2.6 million), Britain (c.2 million), Switzerland (c.1.1 million), Belgium (c.700,000), Sweden (c.410,000) and the Netherlands (c.260,000). West Germany still held pride of place in 1982 (c.4.7 million), ahead of France (c.3.7 million), Britain (c.2.1 million), Switzerland (c.926,000), Belgium (c.886,000) and the Netherlands (547,000). If the relative size of the total population of the respective countries is taken into consideration, a very different order results. For 1982, far ahead of the rest (apart from the exceptional case of Liechtenstein, with 34.1 per cent) was Luxembourg with a foreign population of 26.3 per cent including many employees of international organizations and supranational institutions, followed by Switzerland (14.4 per cent) and Belgium (9 per cent). Then, finally, came West Germany (7.6 per cent), France (6.7 per cent), Britain and the Netherlands (3.8 per cent each).

On the whole, this picture is also skewed by the very different naturalization regulations in individual European countries. Most of those who migrated permanently to France and Britain were naturalized and thus quickly disappeared from statistics on foreigners, so the number of naturalized immigrants for these countries was considerably higher than the number of foreigners. Until its citizenship law reform of 1 January 2000, the opposite was true in Germany, where in-migrants generally remained foreign nationals even if they stayed in Germany permanently, and their foreigner status was even passed on to their children in the second generation. Figures for the foreign population were thus often dramatized and made to appear scandalous, though the problem was at least in part a home-made statistical one.

Migratory movements that arrived in Europe after the end of the postwar mass migrations proceeded in partly overlapping waves from different home regions to different destinations. In the colonial countries involved in the decolonization process, European return migration and non-European immigration to Europe from released or liberated overseas territories were initially predominant. Parallel to and following these movements, largely inner-European labour migrations developed from the mid-1950s in countries that had no colonial or post-colonial migration, and sometimes also in former colonial countries. This labour migration was stopped or limited in the early 1970s by restrictive intervention in the main receiving countries. Families were still allowed to join family members who had already immigrated, however, and this soon assumed the size and contours of an independent major migration movement, though it developed differently depending on the respective migrant group. Family reunification hardly played a role for Greeks who emigrated early on, but it was all the more pronounced for Turks who migrated later and was stabilized through migration networks centred around kinship relations.

Into the 1980s, labour migrations divided Europe into a northern in-migration region and a southern out-migration region. The in-migration of refugees and asylum seekers in northern Europe moved into the foreground of public discussion from the late 1970s, although it played a less significant role up to the late 1980s than did family reunification that followed labour migrations. In southern Europe in the 1980s, intercontinental south-north movements instead predominated, which long had largely the character of regular migration to irregular employment. In the Euro-Mediterranean zone, they gradually transformed the former regions of origin of inner-European south-north labour migration into south-north in-migration destinations.

The three main European receiving countries based on absolute numbers in the Cold War era were France, West Germany and Britain.
The related migratory patterns and routes were determined partly by 'privileged' migration conditions that maintained established migratory traditions or built upon cultural and historical connections, and partly by dominant, newly emerged migratory relations that quickly became established through transnational networks with chain migrations and family reunification. In the case of France, this applied to migrations from North Africa and from overseas territories that were still under French administration, and to labour migrations from Italy and later Spain, as well as especially Portugal. In West Germany, this applied to labour migrations from at first Italy and Greece, later Spain and Portugal, and finally especially from Yugoslavia and Turkey, as well as migration from east central and eastern Europe. European migration to Britain was mainly from Ireland; Britain's most significant non-European immigration were Anglo-Caribbeans and Indians (from India and East Africa), as well as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

The weighting of the home regions of migration within and to Europe shifted over time. Not counting refugee migration from East to West Germany up to 1961, the main region of origin in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s was Italy, followed in the 1960s by Spain and Portugal, Greece and Yugoslavia. The main non-European regions of origin in the 1950s and 1960s were Algeria, India, Pakistan and the Caribbean; and in the 1970s, Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia. In the 1980s, migration increased from the Near East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa to France in the west and to Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal in the south.

Boundaries distinguishing the different immigrant groups and immigration forms were often fluid and overlapping. Colonial and post-colonial bridges also brought labourers, refugees and asylum seekers to Europe. Recruited labour migrants often became de facto or de jure immigrants who were later joined by their families. After the end of recruitment and authorization of labour migrations in central, western and northern Europe in the early to mid-1970s, the same routes then served chain migrations from non-European regions – such as Turkey or Algeria. They sometimes assumed the form of asylum migrations since conditions in the countries of origin had worsened dramatically or because there were scarcely any other ways to enter Europe, except for family reunification. The group of refugees and asylum seekers itself included not only individuals who were politically persecuted in the ever-narrowing sense of European asylum law definitions, but also war and civil war refugees as well as immigrants from the world's economic and environmental crisis regions. In-migration of eastern European minorities who had suffered long-term oppression or were subjected to renewed hardship was made possible by state agreements during the Cold War; subsequently, it increased considerably, based on overlapping personal motivations and self-defined identities, especially as regards the immigration of binational families. In all of these areas there was always also irregular or illegal in-migration and extended stays, the number of which can only be estimated though it clearly rose as Europe increasingly closed itself off to in-migration.

Overlapping migration forms, motivations and migrant identities are not evidence of the plausibility of possible doubt regarding the 'correct' identity of 'true' refugees, labour migrants or immigrants. They simply reveal the superficiality of common notions that claim it is possible to distinguish clearly between different migrant identities, even apart from any statistical and data-collection difficulties. Among the unintended consequences of migration policy anchored in law is that migrants are defined using attributes which, while being consistent with the law, often do not reflect actual life experience yet force migrants none the less to fit into certain categories. Migration networks and home region communities help make it possible to cope with the everyday legal and social limitations that arise from this kind of categorization and definition of self and other. All of this must be borne in mind when reading the overview of the main groups given below, the smallest common denominator of which is not personal identities but assigned characteristics of legal status.

The overview of migration within and to Europe up to the end of the Cold War is concentrated on three main areas: Euro-colonial, colonial and post-colonial migration (see section 1), labour migration (sections 2 and 3) and refugee and asylum migrations (section 4). The migrations of eastern European minorities described as 'ethnic migrations' began during the Cold War within the scope of international treaties, but they developed to a much greater extent only after the Cold War ended. They will be reviewed in the next chapter on migratory events of the 1990s (see chapter 5, section 2).

1 Decolonization, Colonial and Post-colonial Migration

There had been discussion worldwide about breaking down the conditions of colonial rule since the end of the First World War. Moritz J. Bonn, German emigrant and economist in London, coined the term 'decolonization' in the 1930s to describe the process. The actual end of the European colonial age, however, did not come until after the Second World War. The war shattered colonial rule once and for all and accelerated the emancipation process that was then pushed further by the Cold War's competition of systems. European colonial empires
collapsed around the world, first in Asia and then in Africa, as a result of either peaceful negotiations or bloody battles for liberation. Among the outcomes of decolonization were two large migration movements to Europe that converged and overlapped. First came European settlers and members of colonial administrations and militaries. Parallel to or following them came auxiliary colonial troops or pro-colonial ethnic groups and other groups of non-European descent who had remained in the service of the colonial powers to the end and then had to reckon with discrimination or persecution as 'collaborators'.

There were about 7 million Euro-colonial immigrants, or people of European descent, who arrived in Europe from the colonies between 1940 and 1975. Precise statistics are lacking on the immigration of ethnic minorities or 'collaborators' of non-European descent, especially considering the great mixing of European and non-European populations, for example in the Dutch colonial empire. All that is certain is that Euro-colonial immigrants predominated by far. Many had not left Europe until the first half of the twentieth century, when emigration to the colonies was particularly heavy. Other families had already spent generations living in the colonies, whose European populations usually remained tied to those in the 'mother countries' through continual migration cycles. The largest contingents of Euro-colonial immigration to Britain came from Kenya, India and Malaysia; in France and Italy they came from North Africa; in Belgium, from the Congo; in the Netherlands, from Indonesia; and in Portugal, from Angola and Mozambique.

The regions of origin, directions and sizes of these Euro-colonial, colonial and post-colonial migrations were determined by the imperial decline that progressed in stages as the respective countries ended their colonial status. Estimates of the volume of return migration and immigration from Europe's colonial regions triggered by the process of decolonization range from 5.5 million to 8.5 million. As of the late 1940s, Britain, Belgium and Italy were affected the most. Between 1953 and mid-1962 (Commonwealth Immigrants Act), an estimated 391,000 migrants left the New Commonwealth for Britain (plus another approximately 60,000 Irish per year). The stock of foreigners in Belgium grew from 368,000 in 1947 to 433,000 in 1962, and about 40,000 migrants came from the Congo in 1960 alone. Between 1940 and 1960, at least 550,000 migrants returned to Italy from the colonies and the rest of Africa, though estimates go as high as 850,000. Immigration to the Netherlands came from Indonesia and, in 1951–2, from the Moluccas (Spice Islands); in the 1970s, immigrants came mostly from Surinam and the former Dutch Antilles. On 1 January 1990, more than 800,000 of the total population of about 15 million in the Netherlands had come from the former Dutch colonial regions. After the Evian accords (1962) between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) came the resettlement of more than 1 million Algerian-French ('pieds noirs') (who had originally come mostly from Italy, Spain and Malta), Algerians who fought for the French (barkis) and Algerian Jews.6

While post-colonial chain migrations were already underway bound for England, France and the Netherlands, Euro-colonial immigration to Portugal had just got started in the 1970s from the embattled African colonies. Once it got going, however, it was very strong. Within 18 months in 1975–6, about 800,000 retornados arrived in Portugal, especially from the disputed African colonies of Angola and Mozambique, as well as from Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands and São Tomé and Príncipe. The economically underdeveloped 'mother country', which was also receiving its demobilized troops after the end of the colonial wars, experienced a population growth of 10 per cent within a very short period of time, serving to aggravate the problem of unemployment.7

Long after European rule ended, post-colonial conflicts in the former colonial regions continued to provide impetus for Euro-colonial emigration and return migration, and especially for refugee migrations of ethnic minorities (see chapter 5, section 4). On top of that, foreign 'scapegoats' were sometimes sought for post-colonial mismanagement, such as in 1997–8 in Zimbabwe. Post-colonial migration, whose course was set by traditional contacts with the former colonial metropolises, was given a push not only by conflicts and economic and social crises in the regions of origin. It was also accelerated by the interests of former 'mother countries' for cheap labour to perform semi- and unskilled tasks at wage and working conditions that were no longer tolerated by local labourers. Migration from the earlier colonial regions developed its own, self-propelling momentum through chain migrations with family members following later on, intercontinental migration networks, and a focus on ethnicultural and ethnosocial settlement. The mythos behind the foundation of post-colonial chain migrations included, in Britain for example, the sensational landing of the Empire Windrush in Tilbury docks in 1948 with 492 passengers from Kingston, Jamaica aboard. These were by no means the first immigrants to Britain from the Caribbean, but their arrival represented a symbolic anchoring of migration chains that resulted in the Anglo-Caribbean population in Britain growing to about 265,000 people by 1971.8

Euro-colonial immigration and parallel and subsequent colonial migrations were facilitated through citizenship and linguistic-cultural bridges as well as through return migration and integration programmes for Europeans and colonial immigrants, who to some extent ultimately received equal rights. Guaranteed rights and reintegration programmes could not prevent some people from reacting defensively towards even
Euro-colonial return migrants, such as the Algerian-French on Corsica. Indeed, sometimes the reaction was precisely because of the integration aid. But the state-supported integration of Euro-colonial immigrants was usually met with understanding and benevolence, and generally progressed without any major social problems.

The situation was different regarding immigrants from colonial auxiliary troops or ex-colonial ethnic groups and other colonial 'collaborators' who left the country along with or after the colonial power. Mental structures of subordination, racist thinking and latent or even open discrimination that had characterized colonial rule sometimes survived in Europe beyond the end of colonialism overseas. Many non-European immigrants from colonies that had obtained independence long remained economically and socially disadvantaged, such as the Malians in France, the former members of the Dutch East Indies elite troops who drew attention to their precarious situation through the notorious train hijacking of 1973. A similar situation existed in France for the Indian subcontinent under British colonial rule, and in France for the Algerian harkis and generally the Arabs and members of the second generation of North Africans, referred to using the defamatory slang term beurs. About 150,000 harkis were abandoned after the Algerian War, in which they fought for France, and persecuted as 'traitors' and 'collaborators'; some were even killed. Those able to flee to France were put up in 'transit camps' under miserable conditions; some were still living there in the 1990s. Though they were finally granted French citizenship, roughly 70 per cent were unemployed.

Post-colonial immigration pressure prompted the European colonial powers, especially Britain and France, to seek ever-tightening immigration restrictions for non-European immigrants, which was difficult to justify in view of their colonial past. This led to increasing signs of Euro-racism, with exclusive self-images and racist notions of foreigners. Since his notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech of April 1968, Enoch Powell had been agitating in Britain, warning against the imminent displacement of the native population by the excessive growth of the black immigrant population, and against the loss of 'national character' and 'cultural identity' ('Englishness'), thus laying the cornerstone for a racist construction of social and political contexts. In the 1970s, too, under the influence of Powellism, the anti-immigration National Front in particular was in the headlines. In France, where the political leadership had still sworn indissoluble ties to Algeria in 1962, debate on North Africans was dominated in the early 1990s by the catchwords 'ghetto' and 'Islam'. In 1989, about 800,000 entry visas were still being issued for North Africans, but in 1993 this figure was only around 100,000. Non-European immigrants from former colonies became targets of racist agitation by rightwing extremist currents and parties. Anti-immigration sentiments were directed against 'Arabs', 'beurs' and the 'blacks', whose parents were from sub-Saharan Africa and the Antilles. North Africans became a particular target of aggression of the radical rightwing Front National under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, who achieved a spectacular breakthrough in the 1983 local elections from what had hitherto been a marginal position. Front National agitation gave particular weight to the demagogic distinction between what it considered 'integrable' (Catholic) migrants from the overseas territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique, who received citizenship and free access to the metropolis, and the demonized (Muslim) migrants from the Maghreb. Even where legislation strove to ensure equal economic and social opportunities, disadvantages remained egregious. In the Netherlands, for example, despite virtually exemplary legislation guaranteeing equal rights and equal opportunity, in the early 1990s there was mass unemployment of about 40 per cent among young people of Surinamese descent.

More difficult sometimes was the situation of those with guaranteed admission or passports issued by the former colonial powers who remained in the now independent states of the earlier colonies. Later, when many tried to escape discrimination or persecution by resettling in Europe, they found themselves confronted with unexpected obstacles to entry in the former 'mother countries'. Non-European immigrations were countered with a series of defensive measures that has been described as the 'racialization' of European migration policies in the sense of the concept developed by Frantz Fanon and operationalized by Robert Miles. This applied to the Indians of East Africa, for example, who despite their British passports were the targets of a racist anti-immigration campaign in the late 1960s and early 1970s in England because they came, or wanted to come, at a time when defence mechanisms were increasingly being sought to fight post-colonial chain migrations along established migration routes. Immigration became a topic of political confrontation after the racial unrest in 1958 in the London district of Notting Hill and in Nottingham in the English Midlands, as well as in the subsequent discussion on immigration restrictions. It often carried clearly racist undertones and was equated with the influx of migrants of colour from the Commonwealth. Interest groups and task forces started emerging after 1960, such as the Birmingham Immigration Control Association and Southall Residents' Association (1960), and the aforementioned National Front (1966), which took part in the 1970s elections on an anti-immigration platform. There was also the 'Halt Immigration Now' campaign and the British Campaign to Stop Immigration (1972). The racist election platform of Conservative Peter Griffiths for the 1964 general election and Powell's notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 have to be seen within the same context.
Official British policy as of 1960 supported the maxim that stable ethnic relations could only be guaranteed by means of strict immigration controls. After the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was passed in 1962, legislation concentrated on limiting 'non-white' immigration. This also included continued restrictions on demands by Commonwealth citizens for full British citizenship. In 1968 the Second Commonwealth Immigrants Act was hastily passed, aiming to prevent the immigration of British citizens of Indian descent from East Africa who had escaped to Kenya and wanted to flee renewed persecution. The Immigration Act of 1971 served the same purpose, and in 1972 Uganda's Asian population was forcibly out, leading to the flight of about 27,000 Asians to Britain. That gave new fuel to the anti-immigration campaign, especially when Margaret Thatcher made populist concessions in early 1978 that legitimized fears in the British population of being 'swamped by people with a different culture'. Culturalist and racist arguments helped keep the immigration issue on the political agenda into the 1980s. In 1981 a new law was passed that restricted acquisition of British citizenship; in 1988 another law, the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, also opposed immigration of asylum seekers and fined airlines £1,000 for every passenger without valid entry documents. Britain had entered the 'Dark Age of obsessive control' (Panikos Panayi) in the early 1970s, and by the end of the 1980s it had more immigration controls than any other European Community country. At the same time, graffiti such as 'Blacks go home' or 'Send them back' could be seen in the streets and there was brutal rioting against immigrants (so-called 'Paki bashing').

The British colonial empire had once spanned the globe, and in the early 1980s it still united more than 900 million people in the Commonwealth. Starting with the 1981 British Nationality Act, British passports and thus unrestricted opportunities for immigration were available only in two old-style colonies, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, which had two notable characteristics in common: white populations and strategic or economic significance. The largely non-European inhabitants of the other 12 British Dependent Territories spread around the world no longer had full British passports since the 1981 law introduced three classes of citizenship, which were to serve above all to tighten immigration controls. In contrast to British citizens as bearers of all rights, citizens of the British Dependent Territories and British overseas citizens are no longer released from immigration controls and are subject to the same conditions as those that apply to citizens of the New Commonwealth. The British Dependent Territories are not seeking independence, however, because except for Bermuda they are all dependent on financial subsidies from the disgruntled 'mother country', from Anguilla in the Caribbean to the South Sandwich Islands in the South Atlantic to the 55 residents of the Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific, including the descendants of Fletcher Christian, who led the mutiny on the Bounty in 1789.

The history of Euro-colonial migration ended in the late twentieth century with severe anti-immigration policies to restrict and ultimately cut off post-colonial chain migration. Its overall balance, and that of colonial history in general, was decidedly marked by one-sided European profits, notwithstanding the many tragic and often fatal individual fates of Europeans in the colonies. Even in the process of decolonization, Europe profited from the reversal of Euro-colonial migratory directions, again excepting the individual fates of Euro-colonial emigrants and return migrants. Economic growth in the prospering (except for Portugal) former 'mother countries', which facilitated the integration of Euro-colonial return migrants who were more qualified, went hand in hand with a great additional need for cheap semi- or unskilled labour that could be covered in the former colonial powers through colonial and post-colonial immigrants.

2 LABOUR MIGRATION: 'GUESTWORKERS', IMMIGRANTS, 'ILLEGALS'

Receiving countries in central, western and northern Europe

Transnational labour migration in the industrial countries of central, western and northern Europe since the 1950s comprised largely inner-European movements; in the early 1970s it had achieved a migration balance of almost 15 million. The most important regions of origin — apart from England (Ireland/Commonwealth) and Sweden (Finland) — were in the Euro-Mediterranean zone (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece) and in Turkey. In the Euro-Mediterranean zone, aside from other former colonies and their migrations to the respective 'mother country', was the Maghreb (especially Algeria), whose migrations were initially directed mostly towards France. The largest migration contingent was initially from Italy, followed by Spain, Greece and Portugal. From the late 1960s, Yugoslavia and Turkey came more to the fore. The sequence corresponded largely to that for bilateral recruitment agreements, some of which initiated labour migration and some of which supported existing migration; especially in France and to some extent in Germany, they were soon superseded by transnational migration networks, chain migrations and family reunification.

Migrations were determined especially by the status tension rooted in the economic gap between highly developed industrial destination areas and often still agrarian, pre-industrial regions of origin. In all
countries of origin in southern Europe, labour migrants in the 1960s and 1970s generally came from poor rural, often mountainous regions with insufficient employment opportunities, including northern Portugal, western Spain, southern Italy and northern Greece. They sought ways out of structural unemployment or underemployment, or a chance to earn a lot in a short period of time, thus improving or expanding their economic subsistence base at home. However, labour migration often threw these economically underdeveloped regions back even further, such as the small farming regions in the out-migration areas of Calabria and Apulia in southern Italy, because labourers of prime age either migrated to the industrial centres of northern Italy or emigrated abroad. Those who remained were not in a position to keep the low-yielding small subsistence farms operating that still practised extensive production. In the receiving countries there was interest in inexpensive semi- or unskilled labour, notwithstanding France’s population policy considerations. This corresponded in the countries of origin to an interest in the controllable export of semi- or unskilled unemployed labour and a foreign exchange offset by means of wage remittances. In addition to the interests of employers and their associations in the receiving countries, as well as those of the employees in the ‘sending’ or ‘recruitment countries’, political interests in European integration and state economic aid also played a role on both sides. Regulated transfer relations were supposed to support Europe’s economic approach.

At the beginning of what would soon become millions of labour migrants, there was thus mutual interest in importing or exporting labour forces. It continued with gradual economic growth, interrupted only temporarily in the recession of 1966–7, into the early 1970s and was implemented differently in the immigration and integration policies of the respective receiving countries. Labour migration was choked off in the early 1970s in a one-sided action by the in-migration regions. The worldwide ‘oil price shock’ in 1973 shook people’s faith in boundless growth. For the main European receiving countries it was cause enough to stop recruitment and migration, a step that had already been demanded, considered and partially implemented. With economic growth slowed down and unemployment increasing, albeit at different rates, in-migration limitations in the 1980s were usually maintained or even tightened.

Foreign labour migrants in Europe’s welfare-state industrial development centres, and also non-European immigrants in the former colonial states, again assumed important replacement, expansion and buffer functions. They greatly resembled the European labour migrants during the period of economic growth from the mid-1890s to the eve of the First World War. This was true despite far-reaching changes in basic condi-

tions, especially as regards economic structures, operational organization, production technology and the complex systems that have since been developed for modern labour and social administration, incorporating foreign labourers into welfare-state protection and benefit schemes in a way that varied from country to country. At the beginning of European labour migration in the mid-1950s, there had been no acute labour shortage with respect to the economy as a whole in the prosperous destination countries. To some extent, in fact, there was even a relatively high level of unemployment: in West Germany, which concluded its first recruitment agreement in late 1955 with Italy, the average annual rate of unemployment was still around 5.1 per cent. Only in the summer months, at 2.7 per cent, had it actually already sunk to the level of full employment; outside the peak season it still reached almost 7 per cent, and in some rural regions it even exceeded 10 per cent. Nevertheless, the first demands for recruitment of foreign labour came from the Baden-Württemberg farmers’ association. At first it was less an issue of labour shortage than of replacement demand on the labour market.

Most important were replacement functions in occupational areas in which native labourers found neither the wages nor especially the working conditions attractive. Foreign labour migrants still did, though, compared with conditions in their country of origin; and especially in view of their main interest in the highest possible wage remittance, they neglected labour conditions decisive for permanent employment.

On the one hand, moderate wages that could be increased considerably through overtime or piecework dominated here in areas in which capital-intensive modernization forced by a shortage of labour would have led to a ‘purging crisis’. The result would have been the demise of many marginal businesses that were short on capital or which in any case could not, or not entirely, be modernized through labour-saving means and machinery. This was true, for example, for the fish and meat processing industry and, until the general ‘death of textiles’ in Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s, for semi- and unskilled work in companies in the textile industry that were at the break-even subsistence level. It also remained the case in construction and cleaning services, as well as in the catering trade and to a lesser extent also for some seasonal agricultural jobs that could not be automated, such as the grape and asparagus harvests. In such fields of work, and not regarding the economy as a whole, foreign employment could temporarily slow down the increase in wages. This wage pressure specific to certain fields or groups also affected native workers in these jobs, which gave nationalistic currents renewed occasion to agitate against foreigners ‘pushing out’ the local workers.
On the other hand, foreign labour migrants did collect around jobs which paid agreed rates but which were especially difficult or dangerous or which posed a health hazard, such as the asbestos industry, or in highly modern but nerve-wracking areas of work such as on the assembly line. Foreign labourers suffered under such working conditions no less than local workers, and after a certain time they frequently stopped working because of the same occupational health problems. This was hardly noticeable because many victims of occupational illness took their health problems back with them to their home countries. None the less, the legitimizing legend again circulated in many receiving countries – like that of the ‘eager and cheap’ foreign labour migrants in pre-First World War Germany – that foreign workers were better able to cope with such working conditions and were generally more resilient than the ‘weakening’ nationals.

When the European labour migrations of the 1960s swelled into mass movements, in addition to the general reduction in working hours in most immigration countries, different degrees of upward social mobility among native labourers had started, underpinned by increasing, often company-fostered career qualification. Upward mobility and qualifications were both clearly facilitated through foreign employment: while in West Germany, for example, the number of local workers declined by 2.3 million from 1960 to 1972, the share of foreigners in the total labour force increased from 1.3 per cent in 1960 to a peak of 11.9 per cent in 1973. The influx of 2 million foreign labourers in the 1960s only caused the total number of workers to increase from 26.3 million to 26.7 million. It thus largely closed up labour gaps, increasing the total number of workers only minimally. The possibilities for professional and social advancement were usually not open to foreign labour migrants, though they supported them indirectly by the development of a sub-stratum below local labour in the divided labour market that was characterized by a highly internationalized lower stratum. The slipstream caused by professional and social advancement, as could be observed in many areas of work, served to increase the labour shortage in other areas that were not linked to these developments. This could be balanced with the help of foreign labour; the social climb of local labour could thus be eased operationally and economically by the emergence of a sub-stratum of foreign labour.23

In cases of high economic growth and generally increasing labour shortages, the foreign reserve army fulfilled both replacement and expansion functions in central areas of production, especially mining and heavy industry. Foreign labour also served as an economic buffer, or ‘shock absorber’, as was apparent for the first time in the economic recession of 1966–7, when it dropped abruptly (by about 30 per cent in Germany) in areas largely dependent on economic factors. Many foreign nationals then exported their unemployment through return migration, which drew the home regions into the buffer function for the benefit of the destination countries. International disturbances in economic growth also had an impact on the home regions of labour migrants, whose economies were then further burdened by reimporting unemployed workers in addition to the problems of reintegration.24

In contrast to the chiefly permanent immigration from the former colonies, labour migrants recruited through bilateral agreements usually came for either a limited or open-ended period of time. Although fluctuation was still high in the late 1960s, a change typical of the transition from circular migration flows to chain migrations could already be identified. For instance, permanent stays increased and a shift in the main living base to the destination regions was clearly discernible especially through family reunification, which accelerated greatly from the mid-1970s. Unintentional consequences of immigration restrictions of the early 1970s reinforced this impact.

The ‘oil price shock’ of 1973 was less a trigger than a final chance to stop recruitment and immigration. Switzerland had led the way as early as 1970 and Sweden in 1972, followed by Germany in 1973 and France and the Benelux countries in 1974. Among the reasons were not only acknowledgement that resources were limited, fears of the end of economic growth and general crisis perspectives, but also scepticism about the shift from work stays to permanent stays, that is, actual immigration situations and the attendant social problems. Also, defensive stances were growing with respect to certain immigrant groups, reinforced by a xenophobic, culturalist discourse. In France it was mostly directed towards North Africans, in West Germany towards the Turks; both were Muslim minorities. Receiving countries tried to break the chain migrations that were increasing via firmly established migration networks and routes by imposing restrictions, which were also directed against migration from the former colonies. Whereas migration and integration policies went their separate ways, the diversity of these restrictive measures protesting immigration formed a consensus of defence, marking the beginning of the historical path that would end in ‘Fortress Europe’ after the end of the Cold War.

The recruitment and immigration ban of the early 1970s usually had only a short-term effect, and in the long term sometimes even worked against its objectives. There were various reasons for this. Foreign labourers were abruptly faced with the alternative to ‘stay or go’, since taking leave from the labour contract to return for an extended period of time could mean leaving for ever. In many cases this would have meant disqualification, because the new qualifications acquired in the receiving
countries were difficult or impossible to apply in the home countries. Moreover, returning would have meant giving up what had become a clearly different standard of living. Many therefore decided to stay, which accelerated the decrease in transnational fluctuation, increased the base of permanent residence and shifted the main living bases to the destination countries by having the rest of the family join the migrant. Family reunification was guaranteed by European regulations for the protection of the family (Article 19, Section 6 of the European Social Charter), despite all national attempts to impose restrictions, especially relating to adult children who had been born and raised abroad and other family members following their family.25

Special social benefits, such as child benefits in West Germany, led to increased immigration of children and adolescents to join parents. Consequently, from 1973 to 1975, more than 31 per cent of all new immigration was attributed to family reunification,26 which in other countries, too, quickly developed into one of the largest immigration movements or even – as in the United States – the largest. In the wake of the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968, Britain tried to limit the immigration of Commonwealth citizens by restricting work permits. The ordinances were wholly ineffectual regarding family reunification: from July 1962 to December 1968, only 77,966 male workers entered Britain, as opposed to 257,220 dependants. In 1969–77, 58,875 workers came and 259,646 dependants.27

For countries of the European Community (EC), labour force transfers in Europe, as previously noted, also had to do with issues of European integration from the outset. The goals were not only to dismantle customs barriers but also to ensure freedom of movement on the labour market, which left the recruitment ban for member states largely ineffective. This was the case for Italy as a founding member of the European Economic Community (EEC), for Greece starting in 1981, and Spain and Portugal as of 1986. In West Germany, for example, the number of foreign nationals decreased for a short time after 1973 (3.97 million), but as of 1978 it had already climbed back up (3.98 million), exceeding that level in the year of the recruitment ban and continuing to rise. Behind the dysfunctionality of the immigration restrictions was the “liberal paradox” (James Hollifield) that does not allow liberal states operating under the rule of law completely to cut off migration processes that are underway, without violating basic humanitarian obligations or principles of human rights.28

The migration restrictions hit Turkish immigrants the hardest. As the last to grow into a mass movement, Turkish immigration was broken off by the recruitment ban in the midst of a phase of massive expansion. Further growth of the Turkish population in the European countries of immigration resulted largely from natural population growth, family reunification and, to a minor extent, from migration for reasons of asylum (especially Kurds). In virtually all central, western and northern European host countries, there was a clear shift in weight from European to non-European foreigner populations from the late 1970s to the late 1980s; in France in particular, this was partly influenced by naturalization. While the number of Portuguese, Spaniards, Italians, Greeks and Yugoslavs decreased in the period 1978–89 (except in Switzerland, where the number of Portuguese and Yugoslavs increased), there was a great increase in the number of Turks and North Africans. In some countries, in fact, the number doubled (Moroccans in the Netherlands; Turks in France).29

The shift from work stays to immigration situations was accompanied by changes – accelerated by recruitment bans and immigration restrictions – in the demographic structures of immigrant populations and their status on the labour market: the employment rate, usually high with respect to temporary labour migration, went down as a result of family reunification, since there was a rise in non-working family members. Instead of exporting unemployment in times of crisis by means of return migration to the home countries, an internal buffer function set in, in the form of unemployment that was far above the average among resident foreign populations in the receiving countries. The replacement function generally remained, whereas the function of filling the lower stratum as local workers advanced socially and professionally was often passed on to more recently immigrated groups in a kind of “change of shifts in the substructure”.30 In the long term, there was often limited professional and social advancement from the level of semi- and unskilled labourer to that of skilled craftsman, apart from greater upward social mobility of isolated groups also in the area of self-employment, especially in ethnic business. However, a lower stratum clearly marked by ethnosocial characteristics usually remained intact.31

In West Germany, for example, the social security systems of the welfare state, in which foreigners with firm residence status also participated, did prevent structural marginalization, in the sense of an ethnosocial subproletariat, of the foreign minority that evolved from the “guestworker population”.32 But they did not break down the inequality of professional and social opportunities, from the blatant overrepresentation of foreign nationals in unemployment to their no less conspicuous underrepresentation, albeit with clear group-specific differences, in school, vocational training and higher education. In unified Germany, where youth unemployment grew dramatically in the 1990s, one in eight young Germans (including immigrated ethnic Germans from eastern Europe) had not completed any vocational training in 1999 and was
thus without a decisive qualification for the labour market; among young foreign nationals in Germany, the ratio was one in three.33

In the late 1970s to early 1980s, all receiving countries in central, western and northern Europe had become immigration countries at least in a quantitative sense, to the extent that permanent immigrations outnumbered emigrations. The British Isles remained an exception in this regard, where the Republic of Ireland was still an emigration and out-migration region with a negative migration balance, and Great Britain (including Northern Ireland) also noted continued overseas emigrations, retaining a negative migration balance until 1985-9. In the rest of Europe, only Belgium had a negative balance in 1980-9, owing to high emigration and low immigration. In all cases, the immigrated populations helped to balance out the declining population growth of the receiving countries.34 Section 3 will use selected examples to discuss the different forms of integration policies in the receiving countries of central, western and northern Europe.

Southern Europe: From ‘sending countries’ to ‘receiving countries’

In concluding this discussion of the history of inner-European south-north labour migration, let us look at the home regions of labour migration in the Euro-Mediterranean zone that also changed from being sending regions to receiving regions in the 1980s.35 A common historical trend in migratory developments in the Euro-Mediterranean zone since the late nineteenth century was the progression from abandoning overseas and European immigration and labour migration to the increased emergence of European south-north migrations to the commencement of intercontinental south-north migration. Intra-European south-north migration from the more traditional regions of origin of ‘guestworker migrations’ was characterized from the mid-1970s – in contrast, for example, to the historically more recent labour migration from Turkey – by minor but consistent chain migrations of family members and (strongest among the Greeks) remigrations to the regions of origin. The economic development gap diminished as compared with northern Europe, while at the same time the head start of southern European regions of origin over those in the ‘Third World’ turned into a bigger lead. In the mid-1970s, labourers from there began to flow to the northern Mediterranean realm, especially from the Euro-African zone with its disproportionately high population growth: the total population in that area grew between 1950 and 1990 from 69.5 million to 189 million. Up to 1980 the average population growth was 2.6 per cent as compared with 0.7 per cent north of the Mediterranean; up to 1990 the ratio was 2.6 per cent to 0.4 per cent. Ageing and rejuvenation of populations coincided: in the early 1990s the share of the population over 64 years in the countries of North Africa was about 4 per cent; in the EC it was 14 per cent. The share of those under 15 years in North Africa was about 50 per cent, while the figure for the EC was about 18 per cent.36

In addition to this tension of demographic economic developments, other factors also helped to determine the course of migration. Northern Europe remained largely closed, starting with the recruitment ban and immigration restrictions of the early to mid-1970s and continuing through the increasingly restrictive and efficient controls in the 1980s against unwanted immigration, especially from the ‘Third World’. Apart from family reunification, special authorization and desired or contractually arranged immigration, access to Europe essentially opened up only through petitions for political asylum, which have increased substantially since the late 1970s (see section 4). They were frequently used as a substitute for absent regular options for immigration and were therefore treated all the more restrictively by the European side.

Options for immigration to southern Europe worked almost the opposite way around. There, political asylum played an insignificant role up to the late 1980s as a means of gaining access to Europe, while border-crossing and irregular employment in the shadow economy were comparatively simple. Though these countries had had administrative experience with emigration and labour migration abroad, they had scarcely dealt with the admission of foreign labourers, much less immigrants. In Italy, where intercontinental south-north migration to the Euro-Mediterranean region emerged earliest and strongest, immigration controls were deliberately treated liberally, unbureaucratically and for a long time generally without a visa stamp, because the overwhelming majority of foreigners were tourists.

Furthermore, the Euro-Mediterranean region traditionally had a strong informal sector with a broad spectrum of semi- and unskilled jobs, especially in agriculture, the service sector (e.g. restaurants), travelling sales, construction, fishing and fish processing. Because of poor wage and working conditions, few local workers could be enticed to take these jobs. Those seeking work or better income under more tolerable conditions decided instead on labour migration in central, western and northern Europe. After returning, they were even less interested in these positions. The resulting replacement demand was filled increasingly by foreign labour from regions with incomparably worse job opportunities. The jobs taken on by foreign labourers also included some that native labour migrants themselves had also performed in countries to the north, though for better pay, such as positions in the catering trade, municipal cleaning services and in construction. Moreover, expansion demand
for example, as regards talk of a ‘non-declared immigration country’ (Dietrich Thranhard), or of ‘immigration in the non-immigration country’ (Wladig Rudolph), or of the ‘immigration country against its will’ with ‘native foreigners’ (einheimische Ausländer) or ‘German with a foreign passport’ (Klaus J. Bade), or of ‘foreign natives’ (ausländische Inländer, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Thomas Schmid), and as regards Switzerland for its aforementioned classification as a ‘non-immigration immigration country’ (Hans-Joachim Hoffmann-Nowotny). Related discussions on immigration and integration issues, apart from the public outrage whipped up over the issue of ‘illegal immigration’, did not develop in the Euro-Mediterranean zone until the 1990s.

All in all, state migration and integration policies in the countries of the European Union have been put under increasing pressure since the late 1980s as regards the functions and scope of action of nation-states, externally, from above, from below, and internally: externally through the process of globalization; from above through the delegation of national functions to the supranational European level (see chapter 5, section 1); from below through processes of regionalization and even ‘localism’; and internally in two ways: first, through the above-noted diminishing selectivity of citizenship with respect to claims for social participation; and second, through the formation of transnational and transcultural identities. This development was certainly promoted as interest in changing citizenship declined because, as has been shown, most basic economic and social rights are achievable even without a new passport after residing in the country a sufficiently long period of time and acquiring the corresponding permanent residential status. But this development also seems to ensue from the fact that national welfare states have forfeited some of their political power to regulate and, for immigrants, they thus lose their central status as a reference point and orienting framework.

4 ASYLUM AND REFUGEE MIGRATIONS

After the major labour migrations were cut off by the recruitment bans and immigration restrictions of the early to mid-1970s, there were basically three types of transnational migration to and within Europe – apart from elite, training and betterment migrations and labour migration between EC countries, which are not affected by restrictions. The first included movements of family reunification and return migration, which tended to be in opposite directions. Family reunification from countries that entered the major movement of labour migration relatively late, such as Turkey, was greater and lasted longer than that from southern Europe, where it was outweighed in the long term by return migration, especially in Greece. A second form included regular immigrations (‘tourists’) largely by people of non-European descent who entered into irregular employment, especially in southern Europe but to some extent also in France, with a rising percentage from the Afro-Mediterranean zone. A third form of migration was that of asylum seekers from the ‘Third World’ and later, in increasing numbers, from eastern Europe. Their destinations were mostly in central, western and northern Europe, especially Germany, with its right to asylum that was long the most liberal in Europe. As Europe shielded itself off more and more, applying for asylum was used by many as apparently the only immigration option still open, sometimes standing in contrast to the many applications motivated by true political persecution, even in the sense of the ever-tightener stipulations of European asylum law, but often also overlapping with such motivations.

In public and political discussion on migration in the 1980s, preoccupation with the immigrant population that emerged from labour migrations in central, western and northern Europe receded behind the subject of ‘asylum’. At the same time, the subject of ‘illegality’ moved to the fore in the Euro-Mediterranean zone, whereas it did not become a focus of discussion in central, western and northern Europe until the 1990s. In southern Europe, migration for purposes of asylum played only a minor role up to the late 1980s. Here the regular immigration for irregular employment noted in section 2 above was predominant. The following overview therefore centres on immigration by asylum seekers and other refugees in central, western and northern Europe with special consideration given to Germany, which was most affected; in closing we shall also look at developments in the area of asylum in southern Europe.

The divide between the north and south also applied to asylum issues for the two different immigration axes in both major regions. Until the end of the Cold War, northern Europe was at first affected primarily by continental east–west migrations and later increasingly by intercontinental south–north migrations of asylum seekers. The south was mostly affected by intercontinental south–north migrations until after the end of the Cold War, when continental east–south–north and intercontinental south–east–north migrations also became significant (see chapter 5, section 4). In France, Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands, immigration of African and Asian asylum seekers came to the fore, following the path of established migratory traditions. East–west migrations dominated at first in (West) Germany, Austria and Switzerland for geographical reasons. Germany, which in absolute numbers was the most significant immigration country for asylum seekers, was the destination of most African and Asian asylum seekers.
Several factors were responsible for the different immigration profiles of asylum and refugee migrations in central, western and northern Europe: (1) geographical proximity between home and destination regions, relativized through global networks of transportation systems, apart from the separating impact of the Iron Curtain; (2) economic, political and cultural connections and linguistic bridges from colonial history; (3) migratory traditions created through chain migrations and networks that emerged in the destination regions, stemming from colonial, post-colonial, ‘ethnic’ migrations and labour migrations, which continued to have an impact through family reunification even after chain migrations were restricted.

A fourth factor was the different economic and social attractive forces of individual host countries. These were often overestimated as an independent determining factor, however, which led to dubious attempts to reduce the supposed attractiveness of admission conditions through deterrent measures, at the expense of the asylum seekers and refugees taken in. In reality, the effectiveness of these attractive forces was essentially dependent on the transfer of information through migratory networks and was consistently obstructed by a fifth factor, the asylum policies and legal practices of the host countries. These had varied degrees of trenchedness, were often changing and sometimes set up deliberately as a deterrent, that is, to break down ‘pull’ factors. This produced the situation that the economic and social conditions of a destination country that might have attracted asylum seekers were made accessible to them only partially, temporarily or even not at all, such as in Germany, owing to restrictions on freedom of movement, bans on employment, accommodation in mass lodgings with communal meals, and so on. Such information also made its way back to the home regions through migratory networks and could lead to a change in the direction of asylum migration, which was described in the disparaging jargon of European political asylum authorities as ‘asylum tourism’ or ‘asylum shopping’. This is why migratory networks as well as asylum chain migrations must be viewed as important determinants in migratory events.

From the late 1970s the annual number of asylum seekers in Europe rose substantially, passing the 100,000 mark for the first time in 1980 and exceeding 150,000 by the end of that year. Looking back from 1992 (more than 690,000 petitions for asylum), this might not seem very dramatic; however, at the time it was indeed spectacular, less so in Europe in general than in West Germany, where more than 100,000 asylum seekers arrived in 1980 alone. The figures for 1980 were politically emotionalized and made to seem scandalous against the background of the previous years. In the 1970s, the annual number of petitions for asylum in Europe was initially rather low. It quickly rose to about 77,000 in 1979 and then abruptly to almost double that figure in 1980. This was largely due to the crisis in Poland and the military seizure of power in Turkey, whereby Polish and Turkish asylum seekers were in part already living in the west at the time and filed their petitions from there. By 1983 (73,700), the number of petitions declined to around the 1979 level, but then quickly rose again in the second half of the decade, reaching almost 430,000 by the decade’s end, a level that had not been reached since the end of the post-war migrations. Most refugees and asylum seekers in Europe to the mid-1970s came from eastern Europe; up to the second half of the 1980s, more came from the ‘Third World’; and since the end of the Cold War most came again from eastern and south-eastern Europe.

The 1951 Geneva Convention signed by all countries of western Europe was concerned primarily with the protection of refugees from eastern Europe who could not or did not wish to return to their home countries following the Second World War. The supplementary Protocol of 1967 removed the geographical and time restrictions of the 1951 document. Since then a refugee is defined as a person who ‘owing to well-founded fears of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it’.74

In practice little remains of this precept of humanitarian protection. In place of long-standing, almost unlimited acceptance came distanced reserve in the 1980s, including towards refugees from the ‘eastern bloc’, and extremely limited willingness to admit refugees from the ‘Third World’. This unwillingness was quickly transformed into national strategies, which initially varied from country to country, of specific defensiveness towards refugees. Behind such strategies was the public and political demonization of the asylum issue, growing to different extents throughout Europe. This had less to do with the reasons for people to seek refuge having changed since the Geneva Convention than with collectively suspected abuse by asylum seekers. The main, if not sole, reason for this change in sentiment was the substantial rise in immigration since the late 1970s. In contrast to the relatively smooth integration of the predominantly well-qualified refugees from the ‘eastern bloc’ who had come in the preceding long period of economic growth, these asylum seekers came at a time when unemployment was high and on the rise, putting pressure on the social budget and making refugees appear as nothing more than extra boarders. The costs associated with admitting asylum seekers, which in 1989–90 amounted to
about 4,000 million DM annually in West Germany, played a central role
in the populist anti-asylum campaign that developed especially during
election campaigns. Unemployed nationals, employed foreigners and
foreign asylum seekers requiring assistance were set against each other
in flawed equations, in which the subject of ‘asylum’ pushed farther and
farther ahead of the subject of ‘foreigners’. The appeal of this populist
and demagogic rationale consequently seemed irresistible to moderate
parties as well, because unemployed voters appeared more important
politically than asylum-seeking refugees.

Material burdens connected with admitting large numbers of refugees
and asylum seekers had long been politically and ideologically relativized.
Even in the years following the Second World War, huge numbers of
refugees had been reckoned with, especially since mass refugee move-
ments were part of everyday experience at that time. The same applied
for the discussion on the soon-famous right to asylum in West Germany’s
Basic Law of 1949, which comprised only four words in German: ‘Politi-
tisch Verfolgte genießen Asylrecht’, ‘Persons persecuted on political
grounds shall have the right of asylum’. It did not say that the state had
the right to grant asylum, as in other countries’ constitutions. On the
contrary, it guaranteed those who were politically persecuted legal en-
titlement to asylum, that is, to be secured refuge until a review of their
petition was completed. This was the response of West German post-war
policies to the experience regarding the admission – or non-admission –
of victims of Nazi persecution who sought asylum abroad from 1933 to
1945. In the constitutional debate on the wording of this basic right to
asylum, some members of the parliamentary council warned in 1948–9
of mass refugee movements. In this context, ‘economic refugees’ (then
Germans from the Soviet occupation zone) were mentioned for the first
time. Nevertheless, any and all restrictions on the German right to
asylum were deliberately excluded.75

But these were European refugees during the Cold War. After the
suppression of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, around 194,000 people
were able to leave their country, mostly across the Hungarian–Austrian
border until it was again closed by the Kadar regime, with the help of
Soviet troops. After the Prague Spring was crushed beneath the tanks of
the ‘fraternal assistance’ of the Warsaw Pact, about 170,000 Czechs and
Slovaks fled to western Europe in 1968–9.76 Both refugee movements
were welcomed with respect for their political heroism and with symp-
athy that was reminiscent of the acceptance of Polish revolutionaries in
the German Confederation and in nineteenth-century France.

Until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, mass emigrations
millions strong from East to West Germany were received with an
equally warm welcome. Theirs was viewed as politically motivated ‘flight
from the Communist sphere of control’, although in this case particularly
there was a great deal of overlap in political, economic and social
motives: here too there were many victims of political persecution. But
economic and social disadvantages also played a role in decisions to
emigrate, for example because of insufficient willingness to adapt polit-
ically or even because of the ‘wrong’ social background or ‘class situa-
tion’. Furthermore, the attraction of the ‘economic miracle’ in the west
was just as strong a motivating factor. In such cases, despite any possible
political background, the configuration of motives for leaving would
never have led to their recognition as politically persecuted persons
according to the practices of asylum law as applied to refugees who
were not from the ‘eastern bloc’ or even from the ‘Third World’. But
the axiomatic Cold War configuration functioned well: refugees from
East Germany, the People’s Republic of Poland, the Soviet Union and
Hungary, and even North Vietnam and Tibet annexed by China were
welcomed with open arms in the west, especially in West Germany,
Switzerland, France and Sweden.77

The situation changed after the 1970s. The 250,000 or so Poles who
had fled to the west in the early 1980s to escape the threat of
Soviet intervention (Brezhnev doctrine), martial law (December 1981–
December 1982) and political oppression were no longer viewed across
the board as political refugees, nor were they warmly received as such.
Germany retained its visa requirement for Poles; Austria even reinsti-
tuted it in 1981. The scepticism that grew along with the numbers of refugees
and asylum seekers consolidated into an aggressive mistrust when the
number of asylum seekers from the ‘Third World’ rose significantly from
1980 and then increased even more steeply starting in 1985,78 because
this development collided with the Eurocentric concept of refugees that
had been marked by one-dimensional east–west notions and the Euro-
pean background of the Cold War. In contrast to the east–west refugees,
‘Third World’ refugees arriving in large numbers were immediately
placed in the harsh light of prohibitive doubt as to whether they were
‘genuine’ refugees, that is, politically persecuted refugees rather than
‘simpl y’ ‘economic refugees’.

The costs connected with granting asylum to large numbers of people
were soon generally made the subject of biased agitation – initially with
the exception of very few countries, such as Sweden – and new provisions
emerged, sometimes disguised as cultural, sometimes openly Euro-racist.
Racist defensive arguments surfaced that were fomented by ethnic visi-
ability in countries without a colonial history, or whose colonial history
had ended long ago. These scarcely differed from those in the former
colonial countries, except that these discursive patterns had emerged
much earlier there. Moreover, nightmare visions gained momentum
through ethnonational and extreme rightwing currents and were used successfully in election campaigns against social democratic governments by populist conservative parties in Britain as well as in France and Germany. They were greedily taken up by the yellow press and were obviously accepted in broad circles. Chief among them was the warning of Europe’s decline in the ‘floods’ of new ‘migrations of nations’. This warning was doubly absurd, since refugee migrations increased worldwide yet barely touched Europe; moreover, the historical ‘migrations of nations’ was a long, polymorphous migratory process and not a human storm tide. Of special importance in this context is the equally unrealistic idea of a mass invasion of ‘poverty refugees’ from the misery of the ‘Third World’ and eastern Europe.

In the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s, largely uncoordinated trends towards defensive ‘asylum policies’ grew all the more in the European countries affected most by the immigration of asylum-seekers. They took the form of restrictive changes in legislation, regulations and procedures. After Europe had been closed off at national levels three times - against post-colonial chain migrants, against European and non-European labour migrants and against asylum-seeking refugees from the ‘Third World’ - access to Europe consequently shifted increasingly from the ‘main gates’ to the ‘side gates’ and ‘back doors’, often with fluid transitions. Would-be immigrants who had no chance of admission within the scope of family reunification tried to find a way as an asylum seeker (such as Kurds from Turkey). Others entered as tourists or to visit family, overstayed their entry permits and started irregular employment in the informal sector of the labour market, protected to some extent in their everyday routine through networks of family, acquaintances and compatriots.

Slowly at first in the 1980s, and then at a faster pace with the systematic closing off of ‘Fortress Europe’ at a supranational level in the 1990s, there came the group of illegal immigrants in the strict sense, under the direction of what soon became internationally organized human smuggling. The irregular employment of overstayers and ‘sans-papiers’ in the 1980s, as has been shown, did not generally have the character of an illegal attempt to circumvent immigration barriers; also, it was very much a ‘market-oriented’ response to changes in the supply and demand situation at the lower levels of the informal labour market of European receiving countries. By the late 1980s, however, parallel to asylum-seeking ‘economic refugees’, ‘illegal immigrants’ appeared as a new ‘enemy’.

In an overview of the distribution of a total of about 1.7 million asylum seekers in certain countries of Europe from 1983 to 1990, in absolute figures Germany clearly held pride of place (703,318), followed by France (277,474), Sweden (141,864) and Austria (100,330). All other countries remained decidedly below the 100,000 threshold: Britain (86,972), the Netherlands (72,161), Belgium (51,250), Denmark (40,371), Italy (37,510), Norway (27,661) and Spain (26,840). Britain was well under the EC average for petitions for asylum, while Germany was always above the average. If absolute numbers for 1985 are compared, Germany had almost nine times and France almost five times as many asylum seekers as the United Kingdom. Since these statistics are very complex, only limited comparisons can be drawn. A very different picture emerges if the absolute figures are compared to the population of the host countries. Sweden and Switzerland took in the highest percentage of asylum seekers relative to their total population. In 1985, there was one asylum seeker to 257 residents in Sweden (296 in 1995); in Switzerland the ratio was 1:666 (188 in 1990). In 1985 Germany was next with a ratio of 1:827 (413 in 1990) and Austria with 1:1,128 (342 in 1990). In such a comparison of asylum seekers to total population for 1985 and 1990, France (1,916 and 1,016 residents per asylum seeker, respectively), Belgium (1,860/768) and the Netherlands (2,550/708) hold an intermediate position. Some European countries took in very few asylum seekers relative to their population, such as Italy (10,481/12,073), Spain (16,732/4,520) and Portugal (100,143/131,639). Britain (9,222/1,489) and Greece (7,107/1,632) moved from a very low position in a European comparison for 1985 to an intermediate one for 1990.

The findings are again very different if the number of recognized petitions are compared. In 1988 there was an acceptance rate of 8.6 per cent of all petitions for asylum in West Germany; in Britain the rate was 23 per cent, France 35 per cent, Belgium 21 per cent; and in the Netherlands only 7 per cent of all asylum seekers were granted asylum. In 1989 and 1990, the figures dropped in Germany to 6 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively; in Belgium, to 14 per cent and 6 per cent. In Britain (32 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively), however, the rates did not dive until 1991 (9 per cent); in 1992 the rate dropped to only 3 per cent. In every country that granted asylum, there were considerable fluctuations in acceptance rates depending on country of origin.

The following overview is based on developments in West Germany, since that is where by far the largest number of asylum seekers arrived, starting in the late 1970s. Furthermore, the transition from acceptance of refugees to rejection of asylum seekers was particularly pronounced in the country on the frontline of the Cold War.

West Germany

In West Germany the number of petitions for asylum in the 1950s and 1960s was relatively low, apart from the refugee movements after the
suppression of the uprisings in Hungary and Poland in 1956 and the
Prague Spring in 1968. Until the early 1970s, most asylum seekers were
refugees from the ‘eastern bloc’. Their acceptance was considered a
humanitarian mission and also served the political and ideological legit-
imizing function noted above. East–west refugees were welcome ‘desert-
ers’ who voted with their feet in the contest between systems. The flip
side of the axiomatic acceptance of east–west refugees in the Cold War
was the exclusion of socialist refugees persecuted in the west. This
became obvious in West Germany in 1973, the year of the recruitment
ban, which was also the year of the military coup against socialism in
Chile. Considerations by the social democrat–liberal coalition of the
federal government to take in socialist refugees from Chile gave rise to
a campaign led by the conservative CDU/CSU opposition against the
Chileans, whom they denounced as Communist terrorists. About 2,000
were taken in by East Germany where they received special integration
support, like refugees from the Spanish and Greek civil wars before
them.86

Ever since this campaign against Chilean refugees, political suspicion
of refugees became part and parcel of all West German discourse on
asylum. On top of this, especially regarding refugees from the ‘Third
World’, there was a growing presumption that refugee was sought under
false pretences and that the true reasons were in fact not political but
economic and social. Refugees and asylum seekers were systematically
disparaged politically and polemically through the pejorative and
defamatory German term Asylannten. The coinage and systematic use of
this term, also picked up by the media, turned it into a xenophobic
leitmotif running through the political debate. At the same time, rising
unemployment aggravated social fears. Labour market competition
phobias against refugees were unfounded, since asylum seekers were
prohibited from working – as of 1987 for five years, that is, generally
encompassing the entire asylum proceedings. Even after the ban was
lifted in 1991, nationals still received definite preferential treatment on
the labour market. Yet fears and xenophobic aggression continued to
increase. They were kept alive, or awakened, through political cam-
paigns against ‘bogus asylum seekers’ (Scheinasylannten), ‘asylum
spongers’ (Asylschmarotzer) and ‘economic refugees’, especially from
the ‘Third World’. These would flare up again and again, fanned es-
specially during election campaigns and supported by segments of the
media.

In the 1970s, a decisive turning point occurred in developments in
Germany’s right to asylum. Defensive and restrictive, the change eroded
the constitutional principle that ‘Persons persecuted on political grounds
shall have the right of asylum’. The central concept of ‘political persecu-
tion’ was progressively narrowed down through ‘anti-asylum jurispru-
dence’ (Reinhard Marx); in 1977 it was shifted from the reasons the
person was seeking refuge, that is, the experienced or feared persecu-
tion, to the reasons the persecuting country committed the persecution.
For example, torture as punishment for non-violently claiming basic
democratic rights in a country that routinely used torture as a punish-
ment or interrogation technique was no longer recognized as ‘political’
persecution and thus no longer sufficient grounds for asylum in the
Federal Republic of Germany.87

In 1973, when recruitment was stopped, only 4,792 petitions for
asylum for 5,595 people had been filed. The number of petitions doubled
the following year, but then remained relatively constant until 1976
(8,854 petitions for 11,125 people). From the late 1970s, the statistical
curve of asylum seekers in West Germany climbed steeply from 28,223
petitions for 33,136 people in 1978 and 41,953 petitions for 51,493
people in 1979 to the peak of 92,918 petitions for 107,818 people in
the election year of 1980. That corresponded to almost two-thirds of
all asylum petitions filed in Europe that year (roughly 150,000). West
Germany furthermore continued to be the country where by far the most
asylum petitions were filed in Europe.88

The influx of refugees in the late 1970s no longer came predominantly
from the ‘eastern bloc’ countries but from the ‘Third World’ and fluctuated
according to changes in the crisis situations there. This was evidence of
the fact that immigration of refugees to Germany was not one-sided, induced
only by the attractive economic force of the main European destination
country, but that the impetus came largely from problems in the country of
origin. For this reason, the battle that would soon ignite in West Germany
for fight ‘economic refugees’ by lowering the ‘flight incentives’ was ques-
tionable from the outset in its biased approach. Moreover, worsening the
living conditions for asylum seekers as a supposed deterrent usually hit the
wrong people, namely, the ‘genuine’ refugees. Genuinely fraudulent
asylum seekers, human traffickers and smugglers, on the other hand,
could scarcely be discouraged by such manoeuvres.

The scandalous accusations of ‘asylum abuse’ and demands to ‘speed
up asylum proceedings’ or for ‘consistent deportation’ of rejected asylum
seekers became central election campaign topics against a background of
economic recession, rising unemployment, discovery of the actual immi-
gration situation behind the ‘guestworker’ issue and the annual increase
in asylum petitions beyond the magic threshold of 100,000 in 1980.
Once this atmosphere was created, it continued, and arguments became
frozen into stereotypes. Even when the number of petitions for asylum
dropped dramatically in the early 1980s, politicians continued to talk of
the ‘continuing flood of bogus asylum seekers and economic refugees’.89
The number of asylum petitions dropped off in the early 1980s (to 16,335 petitions for 19,737 people in 1983), to a large extent because of the defensive measures against ‘poverty refugees’ from the ‘Third World’ that were passed by the federal government in June 1980. These were intensified by the introduction of special controls for a number of major countries of origin. ‘Asylum policies’ became more and more an expression of efforts to hinder entry to Germany by people who were ‘suspected’ of wanting to file petitions for asylum. After politics discovered the power of chain migrations and migratory networks in promoting migration, there were increased attempts in the 1980s to slow down the transition from refugee migrations to chain migrations from certain countries through tightened restrictions in a manner reminiscent of epidemic control. Instead of the noble and heroic, albeit fictional, political refugee, the stereotype emerged of the ‘bogus asylum seeker’ and ‘asylum defrauder’, viewed on all sides with suspicion. However, because asylum proceedings were geared towards the ideal of the political refugee, refugees were in fact forced to tell white lies in order to fit the prescribed image of the individual victim of political persecution by the state.

In the mid-1980s, the number of asylum seekers in West Germany started rising again rapidly and in 1986 there were 67,429 petitions filed for 99,669 people. The background to this steep rise in 1986 was the persecution of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka and the general increase in crises and civil war-like conditions in many ‘Third World’ countries. In addition, human smugglers were becoming increasingly active through the gateway of Schönefeld airport in East Berlin and there were more Turkish asylum seekers hoping to circumvent the guidelines for family reunification. In a game of cat and mouse against asylum migration, the curve of asylum petitions was pushed back down in 1987 by defensive control measures. These ranged from blocking entry via East Germany and East Berlin through the introduction of a visa in October 1986 to an amendment to the asylum law in January 1987 that brought, among other measures, restrictive visa requirements for travellers from nine major African and Asian countries of origin of asylum seekers.

After immigration by asylum seekers was cut off through various measures of differing effectiveness in the course of the 1980s, it temporarily slipped out of control in the late 1980s. The curve of asylum seekers again passed the 100,000 mark in 1988, climbing in 1989, the year of European revolutions, to about 120,000 and then to 190,000 in 1990. The number continued to skyrocket; in 1991 it reached almost 260,000, and in 1992, almost 440,000. This post-Cold War line of development was to lead to devastating domestic policy conflicts and xenophobic excesses, culminating in the 1993 constitutional amendment (‘the asylum compromise’) that marked the end of the liberal form of German asylum law that had been laid down in 1949 (see chapter 5, section 1).

Other European countries

Other countries of immigration in central, western and northern Europe were also affected, albeit to a far lesser degree, by the increase in asylum migration since the immigration restrictions of the early to mid-1970s. Sweden ranked third after West Germany and France among European receiving countries: while the number of petitions increased almost sixfold from 1982 (2,500) to 1985 (14,450) and then doubled again by 1989 (30,350), most asylum seekers came from the ‘Third World’, parallel to a sharply rising number of chain migrations. Hence, the number of Chileans in Sweden almost doubled from 1982 (8,400) to 1989 (19,100); that of Iranians increased almost tenfold, from 3,600 to 35,100. Refugees also came from Lebanon and Turkey.

All major European countries that admitted asylum seekers attempted in the 1980s to stem the growing immigration, and in particular the noticeably rising chain migrations, of refugees and asylum seekers by tightening the stipulations of asylum law and occasionally through deterring measures. As noted earlier, the attractive pull of the destination countries was viewed one-sidedly as the determining criterion for migration. The subject of asylum had been increasingly politicized since the late 1970s, especially for election campaign purposes, which led to a narrowing down of political options under the pressure of an agitated public, sometimes mobilized through demagogic means. The demonization of asylum issues in politics and the press, the criminalization of asylum seekers (‘asylum defrauders’, ‘drug dealers’) and the denunciation of opponents of restrictive asylum concepts, on the one hand, interacted with the rise in currents opposing asylum, foreigners and ultimately anything unfamiliar, on the other, which exerted their own pressure for political action or were used as a means to that end.

The restrictions and defence mechanisms prompted by such a background were oriented towards the nation-state. They remained uncoordinated and were largely characterized by a redistribution of burdens at the expense of neighbouring countries which, in turn, introduced their own defence mechanisms to redirect or pass on these burdens. This set in motion a spiral of chain reactions and mutual coercion. Restrictions in Germany, the main receiving country, had serious consequences for neighbouring countries, pushing up the number of asylum seekers in France and Switzerland in the 1980s, and in the Netherlands and Belgium in the early 1990s.

However, some opposite effects also emerged. Behind the sharp drop in the high asylum-seeker statistics in Switzerland from 1991 (41,600) to
1992 (18,000) was the safe-country doctrine. Switzerland was the first country in Europe to pronounce such a doctrine. In October 1990, the Swiss council of ministers had simply declared a number of main countries of origin of asylum seekers to be ‘safe countries’: Hungary, the Soviet Union, Poland and, a short time later, Bulgaria, Algeria and India. In November 1991, Angola and Romania (affecting Roma asylum seekers) were added to the list. Citizens of these countries no longer had any chance of being granted asylum in Switzerland. The aftermath of this declaration significantly affected Germany, where a total of 73,800 Romanian citizens, mostly members of the Roma minority, applied for asylum in 1993 (in contrast to only 200 in Switzerland). Parallel developments in Austria brought similar consequences for Germany, where a partly hysterical and partly demagogic discourse on asylum had paralysed the political ability to act. A new asylum law was introduced in Austria in 1991 centred on the ‘first country of asylum’ clause, which was used to exclude petitioners from eastern Europe. In 1993, only 300 asylum seekers from Romania went to Austria (73,800 to Germany) and only 100 from Bulgaria (22,600 to Germany), while the total number of petitions filed in 1991–3 in Austria went down from 27,300 to 4,700 (whereas in Germany it rose from 166,514 petitions for 256,112 people to 231,889 petitions for 322,599 people). Berhard Santel aptly described this way of resolving problems through redirection as the ‘logic of a negatively competing policy’ according to ‘Saint Florian's principle’ (i.e., ‘Spare my house, burn another’).91 However, before Germany's 1993 asylum law reform, the same applied even within the main European receiving country, where different implementations of restrictive regulations in the individual federal states could lead to internal ‘asylum flight’ from, for example, Bavaria to North Rhine-Westphalia.92

The ‘first country of asylum’ clause, which was increasingly included in European asylum law regulations in the 1980s, could turn asylum seekers into ‘refugees in orbit’ if they were sent back to a first country of asylum which then refused to readmit them. This sacro egoismo in nation-state asylum policies reached its hitherto greatest expansion – and limitation, with respect to the ‘refugees in orbit’ – in European guise in the EC-wide concept of the first country of asylum as laid down in the Schengen agreement (Schengen II) and in the Dublin Convention of 1990. This concept was soon extended to central and eastern European countries through corresponding bilateral treaties. It was intended to prevent multiple petitioning; without having had their petitions dealt with, asylum seekers could be sent back to countries in which they had already filed, or might have filed, a petition. This was actually the geopolitical logic – absurd in a Europe that is growing together – of each country having to bear the responsibility of dealing with migratory events arising due to its geographical location.93

Asylum migration in the Euro-Mediterranean zone, in contrast to northern Europe, long remained a secondary problem. This was largely owing to the fact that the alternative of regular, irregular or even illegal migration for irregular employment was easier to achieve, even in the 1980s. In Portugal there was a total of a mere 3,200 asylum seekers from 1983 to 1989; in Spain there were 18,200; in Greece, 30,450; and in Italy, 43,300.94 Until the end of the Cold War, the number in Italy was relatively high compared with other countries in southern Europe, but with respect to all of Europe it was low. This was partly because Italy granted asylum only to refugees from Europe, which was possible because of the passage about ‘geographical reservations’ in the Geneva Convention on refugees. Immigrants from non-European countries – including Turkey – had no chance of asylum in Italy until the end of the 1980s; consequently, virtually all asylum seekers there were from eastern Europe. Non-Europeans had the choice only between staying in Italy with irregular status or migrating further northwards to file a petition for asylum there. This spurred outrage over a kind of Italian asylum selection at the expense of other countries. The situation changed when the 1989 asylum law reform lifted geographical restrictions and Italy’s asylum law was modified to correspond to the basic regulations valid in the rest of Europe west of the Iron Curtain.

The Iron Curtain was opened in 1989, releasing a wave of migration that seemed to confirm all the worst fears about floods. By that time, the struggle to determine the ‘genuine’ refugee had long since become a battle against asylum seekers who were more or less fundamentally suspected of deception. The definitive thrust towards inter- and supranational ‘harmonization’ of nation-state asylum egos in the common interest of security of the receiving (or defensive) countries was finally supplied by the opening of the European single market. Consequently, with no controls at inner-European borders, insecurity mounted with respect to transnational migration processes, or ‘migratory vulnerability’ in the jargon of security policy.95