

# Immigration and Social Aspects of Sustainable Development. The Case of Germany

## Imigracja a społeczne aspekty zrównoważonego rozwoju. Przypadek Niemiec

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### Abstract

The aim of the article is to show the relationship between immigration and the social aspect of sustainable development. Data from the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) study conducted in 2016 on a sample of 3490 respondents (residents of Germany) was used. Research suggests that this relationship is negative: mass immigration from culturally foreign countries and social environments can significantly reduce the quality of life of residents in developed societies. This manifests in opinions about the need to limit or stop immigration. The case of Germany can probably be generalized to other developed countries, especially from the European Union.

**Key words:** sustainable development, immigration, ALLBUS, social opinion, Germany

### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie związku między imigracją i społecznym aspektem zrównoważonego rozwoju. Wykorzystano dane pochodzące z badań German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) przeprowadzonych w 2016 roku na próbie 3490 respondentów – mieszkańców Niemiec. Wyniki badań sugerują, że związek ten jest negatywny – masowa imigracja z krajów i środowisk obcych kulturowo może znacząco obniżać jakość życia mieszkańców rozwiniętych społeczeństw. Przejawia się to w opiniach o konieczności ograniczenia lub zatrzymania imigracji. Przypadek Niemiec może być prawdopodobnie uogólniony na inne kraje rozwinięte, zwłaszcza z Unii Europejskiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozwój zrównoważony, imigracja, ALLBUS, opinia społeczna, Niemcy

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### Introduction

In what way is immigration linked with the social aspects of sustainable development? First, let us start with the definition of social sustainability. Social sustainability can be described as a state in which participants in social life enjoy a sufficiently high quality of life resulting from a combination of various specific factors. As Robert Prescott-Allen puts it, *human wellbeing is a condition in which all members of society are able to determine and meet their needs and have a large range of choices and opportunities to fulfil their potential* (Prescott-Allen, 2001, p. 13). Immigration can improve the quality of peo-

ple's life, giving them the opportunity to meet representatives of other cultures, broaden their cultural horizons, or learn about other types of behaviour. On the other hand, it can also reduce the quality of life if it creates a sense of threat and results in social tensions. This all depends on what social environment immigrants come to and what is their social background.

Immigration is by no means a new phenomenon in Europe. In recent years, however, its size and social impact have been greater than ever before, giving rise to a new term 'migration crisis'. The problem of growing immigration is probably best seen in Germany and that is why I would like to consider the case of Germany in this article.

The migration crisis has sparked lively political debates throughout Germany, revealing polarized attitudes towards immigration. Only in 2015, about 890,000 people migrated to Germany, marking the biggest migration crisis since World War II. In 2015, for the first time more than 1.2 million people applied for asylum in the EU Member States, with Germany being their first destination. This unprecedented arrival of so many asylum seekers and immigrants revealed divergent views on how to deal with the migration crisis and on what influence it could have on German society (Sola, 2015, p. 2-6). This crisis was characterized by a seemingly unstoppable influx of asylum seekers and migrants who were perceived as culturally more distinct than those who had arrived in the past (Dustmann et al., 2017, p. 497-550).

Tensions between different religious, racial and ethnic groups increased in 2016. The most striking change since 2011 is the growing number of people who started to perceive tensions between religious groups (this number increased from 28% in 2011 to 38% in 2016). Also the percentage of people reporting high tensions between racial and ethnic groups increased from 37% in 2011 to 41% in 2016. Countries where high tensions between religious groups were reported more frequently than the EU average include Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This is connected with Muslim immigration (and debates on this immigration) (Ahrendt et al., 2016, p. 86).

How important is the immigration issue to German people? As shown by studies carried out in 8 European countries<sup>1</sup>, the most important problem in these countries between 2010 and 2017 was unemployment (often combined with the country's economic situation or issues such as rising prices, inflation, cost of living or health and social security). Only in Germany, immigration was indicated as the most important issue throughout the entire observation period (while in Turkey people were most concerned about terrorism in the first place and then about unemployment) (Glorius, 2018, p. 14).

Our main research question is: What is the relationship between immigration and the social aspect of sustainable development?

### Methodology

The data used in this article comes from the research carried out as part of the German General Social Survey program, which was implemented in 2016 on a sample of 3490 respondents.

The German General Social Survey (ALLBUS / GGSS) is a national social program in Germany, which is similar to the American General Social Sur-

vey (GSS). The sample was drawn from all persons (German and non-German) who resided in private households and were born before 1 January 1998. Two stage disproportionate random sample in Western Germany and Eastern Germany was used. In the first sample stage, municipalities (*Gemeinden*) in Western Germany and municipalities in Eastern Germany were selected with a probability proportional to their number of adult residents; in the second sample stage, individual persons were selected at random from the municipal registers of residents. Targeted individuals who did not have adequate knowledge of German to conduct the interview were treated as systematic unit non-responses. The data was collected on the basis of personal, oral interviews with a standardized questionnaire (CAPI – Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) and two additional self-completion questionnaires (CASI – Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing) for ISSP (split questionnaire design).<sup>2</sup> In total, 589 variables were used in the study. The questionnaire used in the study included, among others, questions about immigration. Researchers were interested in opinions of German residents on different immigrant groups. These opinions were expressed on a 3-level scale (immigration should not be restricted, immigration should be restricted, immigration should be stopped). The following immigrant groups were taken into account: ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe, asylum seekers, workers from EU-countries, workers from non-EU-countries (from countries in Europe that are not the EU members), war refugees, political refugees, economic migrants, EU-workers from Eastern Europe, EU-workers from other countries, workers not from the EU-country, spouses and kids of immigrants.

### Results

First, we will analyse opinions on different immigrant groups, which were expressed by choosing one of the three possible answers: immigration of a given group should not be restricted, immigration of this group should be restricted, and immigration of this group should be stopped. Responses were dichotomised into two groups: immigration should not be restricted and immigration should be restricted or stopped. Responses from the second group, i.e. that immigration should be restricted or stopped, were counted.

Table 1 shows the distribution of opinions concerning different immigrant groups. The opinion that immigration should be restricted or stopped is most often expressed in relation to economic migrants (approx. 50%) and non-EU workers (approx. 47%). Such opinion is the least often expressed about workers from EU countries (approx 28%).

1 Germany, Finland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, Hungary and Turkey.

2 More information on the program is available at: <http://www.gesis.org>.

Table 1. Opinions on restricting immigration of different immigrant groups<sup>3</sup>

IMMIGRANT GROUPS	Responses		Percent of cases
	N	Percent	
Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe	1023	8.1%	33.1%
Asylum seekers	1234	9.7%	40.0%
Workers from Eu-Countries	866	6.8%	28.0%
Workers from non-Eu-Countries	1295	10.2%	41.9%
War refugees	995	7.8%	32.2%
Political refugees	1008	8.0%	32.6%
Economic migrants	1549	12.2%	50.2%
Eu-workers - Eastern Europe	1246	9.8%	40.3%
Eu-workers - Other	1057	8.3%	34.2%
Workers not from Eu-country	1456	11.5%	47.2%
Spouses, kids of immigrants	949	7.5%	30.7%
Total	12678	100.0%	410.6%

Table 2. Opinions on restricting immigration by region of residence

IMMIGRANT GROUPS		REGION		Total
		West	East	
Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe	N	659	364	1023
	%	32.8%	33.8%	
Asylum seekers	N	788	446	1234
	%	39.2%	41.4%	
Workers from Eu-countries	N	537	329	866
	%	26.7%	30.5%	
Workers from non-Eu-countries	N	844	451	1295
	%	42.0%	41.8%	
War refugees	N	584	411	995
	%	29.1%	38.1%	
Political refugees	N	595	413	1008
	%	29.6%	38.3%	
Economic migrants	N	989	560	1549
	%	49.2%	51.9%	
Eu-workers - Eastern Europe	N	790	456	1246
	%	39.3%	42.3%	
Eu-workers - other	N	642	415	1057
	%	31.9%	38.5%	
Workers not from Eu-country	N	938	518	1456
	%	46.7%	48.1%	
Spouses, kids of immigrants	N	552	397	949
	%	27.5%	36.8%	
Total	N	2010	1078	3088

These opinions depended on the region of residence (western vs. eastern Länder, Table 2), education and age (Tables 3 & 4).

Residents of Eastern Germany are generally more restrictive in their attitudes to immigration of almost all immigrant groups than those living in Western Germany. These differences are most pronounced in opinions regarding war refugees and political refugees, as well as families of immigrants (approx. 37-38% compared to 28-30%).

Opinions on immigration differ greatly depending on respondents' education: people with low education vs. those with high education. These differences are

both quantitative (up to even a dozen or more percent) and widespread (concerning most groups of immigrants). German residents with a low level of education are much more likely than those with high education to be in favour of limiting or stopping immigration of workers from EU-countries (approx. 34% compared to approx. 21%), war refugees and political refugees (approx. 40-41% compared to approx. 26%), ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe, spouses, kids of immigrants and EU-workers other than from Eastern Europe (36-38% compared to 26-29%), and EU-workers from Eastern Europe (approx. 45% compared to approx. 35%).

<sup>3</sup> As responses to individual questions were counted, the numbers and percentages exceed the sample size and 100%.

Table 3. Opinions on restricting immigration by education level

IMMIGRANT GROUPS		EDUCATION			Total	
		Low	Intermediate	High		
Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe	N	300	418	298	1016	
	%	36.2%	36.8%	27.1%		
Asylum seekers	N	347	491	386	1224	
	%	41.9%	43.3%	35.1%		
Workers from Eu-countries	N	280	352	228	860	
	%	33.8%	31.0%	20.7%		
Workers from non-Eu-countries	N	355	490	437	1282	
	%	42.8%	43.2%	39.8%		
War refugees	N	329	378	281	988	
	%	39.7%	33.3%	25.6%		
Political refugees	N	342	377	285	1004	
	%	41.3%	33.2%	25.9%		
Economic migrants	N	429	557	552	1538	
	%	51.7%	49.1%	50.2%		
Eu-workers - Eastern Europe	N	375	477	386	1238	
	%	45.2%	42.0%	35.1%		
Eu-workers - other	N	314	419	316	1049	
	%	37.9%	36.9%	28.8%		
Workers not from Eu-country	N	414	525	506	1445	
	%	49.9%	46.3%	46.0%		
Spouses, kids of immigrants	N	300	360	286	946	
	%	36.2%	31.7%	26.0%		
Total		N	829	1135	1099	3063

Table 4. Opinions on restricting immigration by age category

IMMIGRANT GROUPS		AGE CATEGORIES				Total	
		-30	31-50	51-70	71-		
Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe	N	128	314	406	173	1021	
	%	28.8%	33.9%	34.2%	32.8%		
Asylum seekers	N	153	370	474	235	1232	
	%	34.5%	39.9%	40.0%	44.6%		
Workers from Eu-countries	N	101	257	338	168	864	
	%	22.7%	27.7%	28.5%	31.9%		
Workers from non-Eu-countries	N	156	392	501	244	1293	
	%	35.1%	42.3%	42.2%	46.3%		
War refugees	N	134	268	409	182	993	
	%	30.2%	28.9%	34.5%	34.5%		
Political refugees	N	141	278	405	182	1006	
	%	31.8%	30.0%	34.1%	34.5%		
Economic migrants	N	225	458	608	257	1548	
	%	50.7%	49.4%	51.3%	48.8%		
Eu-workers - Eastern Europe	N	187	359	484	214	1244	
	%	42.1%	38.7%	40.8%	40.6%		
Eu-workers - other	N	170	311	407	167	1055	
	%	38.3%	33.5%	34.3%	31.7%		
Workers not from Eu-country	N	211	423	576	244	1454	
	%	47.5%	45.6%	48.6%	46.3%		
Spouses, kids of immigrants	N	111	262	404	170	947	
	%	25.0%	28.3%	34.1%	32.3%		
Total		N	444	927	1186	527	3084

tive opinions (immigration of these groups should be restricted or stopped) increases with the age of respondents. In relation to asylum seekers, this percentage increases from approx. 35% in the category of respondents up to 30 years old, to approx. 45% in the group of respondents over 71 years old. The situation is very much similar in the case of workers from non-EU-countries (an increase from approx. 35% to approx. 46%).

When it comes to workers from EU-countries, this percentage of restrictive opinions increases with the age of respondents from approx. 23% to approx. 32%. The rise in negative attitudes towards immigration of spouses and kids of immigrants is slightly smaller, but still noticeable (from approx. 25% to approx. 32%). In several other cases, this rise can also be noted, but it is not so considerable.

Table 5. Opinions on immigration of asylum seekers by age category

ASYLUM SEEKERS IMMIGRATION		AGE CATEGORIES				Total
		-30	31-50	51-70	71-	
Should be unrestricted	N	76	122	112	34	344
	%	33.2%	24.8%	19.1%	12.6%	21.8%
Should be restricted	N	138	342	428	216	1124
	%	60.3%	69.5%	73.0%	80.3%	71.3%
Stop completely	N	15	28	46	19	108
	%	6.6%	5.7%	7.8%	7.1%	6.9%
Total	N	229	492	586	269	1576
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Gamma p&lt;0,0005

Table 6. Opinions on immigration of asylum seekers by education level

ASYLUM SEEKERS IMMIGRATION		EDUCATION			Total
		Low	Intermediate	High	
Should be unrestricted	N	47	86	202	335
	%	11.9%	14.9%	34.4%	21.5%
Should be restricted	N	292	452	372	1116
	%	74.1%	78.3%	63.3%	71.6%
Stop completely	N	55	39	14	108
	%	14.0%	6.8%	2.4%	6.9%
Total	N	394	577	588	1559
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Gamma p &lt;0,0005

Table 7. Opinions on immigration of asylum seekers by region of residence

ASYLUM SEEKERS IMMIGRATION		REGION		Total
		West	East	
Should be unrestricted	N	254	90	344
	%	24.4%	16.8%	21.8%
Should be restricted	N	720	406	1126
	%	69.1%	75.7%	71.4%
Stop completely	N	68	40	108
	%	6.5%	7.5%	6.8%
Total	N	1042	536	1578
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-squared p = 0,002

Let us now take a closer look at the opinions about asylum seekers and war refugees, i.e. those immigrants who are, on the one hand, most in danger in their homelands, and on the other hand, are typically the most culturally distinct (Table 5).

Although only about 7% of German residents believe that immigration of this group should be stopped completely and generally there are no significant differences in this respect depending on the respondents' age, in total approx. 71% of German residents believe that immigration of such people should be limited. This varies depending on age – approx. 80% of the eldest German residents (over 71 years) hold this opinion; while in the group of the youngest respondents (up to 30 years old), this percentage is noticeably lower (approx. 60%).

The influence of education on the opinions about immigration of asylum seekers is even more visible (Table 6). Only about 12% of people with low education believe that immigration of asylum seekers should not be restricted; this percentage increases to approx. 15% in the group of respondents with intermediate education and up to approx. 34% in the

group with high education. Analogically, the percentage of people who believe that immigration of asylum seekers should be limited decreases with education, with a clear dividing line between those with higher education (approx. 63%) and those without higher education (approx. 74-78%). Respondents with low education are most likely to express the view that immigration of asylum seekers should be stopped (approx. 14%), those with intermediate education are less likely to hold this opinion (approx. 7%), whereas people with higher education are the least likely to believe that immigration of asylum seekers should be stopped (approx. 2%).

The region of residence has some bearing on people's opinions about immigration of asylum seekers, but its influence is not as significant as that of age and education (Table 7). Residents of Eastern Germany are slightly more likely to favour limiting this migration than those of Western Germany (approx. 76% compared to approx. 69%).

When it comes to immigration of war refugees (Table 8), only approx. 4% of Germans would like to see this immigration stopped, while approx. 56% would

Table 8. Opinions on immigration of war refugees by age category

WAR REFUGEES IMMIGRATION		AGE CATEGORIES				Total
		-30	31-50	51-70	71-	
Should be unrestricted	N	134	221	228	88	671
	%	50.0%	45.2%	35.8%	32.6%	40.3%
Should be restricted	N	119	249	391	171	930
	%	44.4%	50.9%	61.4%	63.3%	55.9%
Stop completely	N	15	19	18	11	63
	%	5.6%	3.9%	2.8%	4.1%	3.8%
Total	N	268	489	637	270	1664
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Gamma p &lt;0,0005

Table 9. Opinions on immigration of war refugees by education level

WAR REFUGEES IMMIGRATION		EDUCATION			Total
		Low	Intermediate	High	
Should be unrestricted	N	117	211	336	664
	%	26.2%	35.8%	54.5%	40.2%
Should be restricted	N	298	354	273	925
	%	66.8%	60.1%	44.2%	56.0%
Stop completely	N	31	24	8	63
	%	7.0%	4.1%	1.3%	3.8%
Total	N	446	589	617	1652
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Gamma p &lt;0,0005

Table 10. Opinions on immigration of war refugees by region of residence

WAR REFUGEES IMMIGRATION		REGION		Total
		West	East	
Should be unrestricted	N	489	182	671
	%	45.6%	30.7%	40.3%
Should be restricted	N	556	376	932
	%	51.8%	63.4%	55.9%
Stop completely	N	28	35	63
	%	2.6%	5.9%	3.8%
Total	N	1073	593	1666
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-squared p &lt;0,0005

like to have some restrictions put on this immigration. The opinions depend on the age of respondents: the percentage of people who think that immigration should not be reduced decreases with age (from approx. 50% in the youngest group, to approx. 33% in the group of older respondents). On the other hand, the percentage of people who believe that this migration should be restricted increases with age (approx. 44% and approx. 63%, respectively). Age has little influence on the opinion that immigration of war refugees should be stopped completely.

Likewise, when education of respondents is taken into account, the opinion that immigration of war refugees should not be restricted is expressed by approx. 55% of people with higher education, approx. 36% of those with intermediate education and approx. 26% of those with low education (Table 9). Similarly, the percentage of German residents who believe that immigration of war refugees should be restricted decreases with education level (from ap-

prox. 67% of people with low education, to approx. 44% of people with high education). Approx. 7% of people with low education and only approx. 1% of those with high education would like to stop immigration of war refugees (however, this data should be interpreted carefully given small numbers of the dependent variable in this category).

Opinions on immigration of war refugees differ significantly depending on the region of residence. Approx. 6% of inhabitants of Eastern Germany and less than 3% of those living in the western part would like to stop this immigration completely (Table 10). The opinion that immigration of war refugees should be restricted is expressed by approx. 63% of residents of Eastern Germany and approx. 52% of those living in Western Germany. Germans living in the western part are more likely to believe that immigration of war refugees should not be restricted than those from the eastern part (approx. 46% and approx. 31%, respectively).

## Conclusions

Opinions of German residents on policy towards immigrants are divided. Approximately 30-40% of them are in favour of restricting or stopping immigration, but views on this issue depend on the type of immigration. The opinion that immigration should be restricted or stopped is most often expressed in relation to economic migrants and non-EU workers (approx. 50%). Such opinion is most rarely formulated when it comes to workers from the EU (approximately 28%). It is also worth noting that opinions on restricting or stopping immigration of people particularly vulnerable to persecution (war refugees and asylum seekers) are not markedly different than opinions on immigration of other groups, and they stand at 32-40%. In other words, German residents are more likely to accept workers from the EU countries than those who come from outside the EU, and they are generally more likely to accept immigration of workers than immigration of refugees and asylum seekers.

As can be seen, restrictive opinions are more likely to be expressed by people living in Eastern Germany, with a low level of education and by elderly people; i.e. by those whose social position and frequently economic situation is potentially worse. On the other hand, immigration is favoured most often by young, well-educated people from Western Germany.

As already mentioned, I was particularly interested in groups of immigrants that are most at risk in their homelands, i.e. asylum seekers and war refugees. Approx. 71% of German residents believe that immigration of asylum seekers should be limited (with 7% of them believing that it should be stopped completely). When the attitudes towards war refugees are considered, approx. 60% of Germans think that this immigration should be limited (with approx. 4% believing that it should be stopped completely).

German residents are more likely to accept immigration of people who come from countries that are culturally and politically closer to Germany and those who can fill in the gaps in the labour market, than immigration from culturally and politically distant regions, even if this immigration is motivated by threat. This may be partly explained by pragmatic attitude and partly by negative perception of immigrants, being a result of personal experiences or the image presented in the media, which may give rise to a sense of danger.

To answer the key question about the relationship between immigration and the social aspect of sustainable development (measured mainly at the level of life quality), it must be stated that the available data suggests that this relationship is negative if there is a significant increase in the number of immigrants and if they come from environments and countries that are culturally different from their destination

country. This conclusion that is formulated about the situation in Germany can be generalised to other European Union countries, at the very least. The sense of threat associated with the type and size of immigration can significantly reduce the quality of life in developed societies.

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