

Immigration and Emigration in Germany

By Esther Klann, Sarah Waldhauer, Saskia Sack and Armin Bernsee
Germany

As a consequence of Germany's central position in Europe, it has always been a country which was influenced by both immigration and emigration. This text will try to give the reader a general impression of Germany's migration-history from ca. 1871 to the present.

In the 19th century Germany was mainly a country of emigration. Between 1820 and 1890, roughly 5 million Germans emigrated to the United States of America for political, but mainly economic reasons, to escape the prevailing poverty at home. But the industrial revolution at the end of the 19th century also created a first wave of immigration. To fill out open capacities in the evolving industry, 300,000 foreign workers, mainly from Poland, were hired and controlled strictly. They were not wished to be integrated in society or to participate in social life at first. With the beginning and duration of the First World War several German companies began to have their work done by foreign forced labourers.

After the First World War, the number of foreign workers declined. At the same time there was another, smaller wave of emigration to the USA. Most of the new immigrants and emigrants in Europe were now refugees and other people who were forced to migrate by expulsion or resettlement. Through the peace contracts millions of people had to follow the new borders. Also, there were some Russian immigrants in Germany, especially Berlin, who had escaped the Russian civil war.

The time of the first democratic system in Germany ended when the national socialists took power in 1933 and built up their dictatorship. During this dark period of German history a lot of people escaped Germany and also Europe. About half a million German Jews emigrated and were given political asylum abroad. Those persecuted people who did not escape were often deported to concentration camps which sometimes lay in other countries. Up to twelve million foreign labourers were forced to work in the German war industry. Another factor which changed the demographic structure of Europe was the resettlement of Germans into other regions of Europe and the paralleling deportation and murder of the native society by the national socialists.

After the Second World War there were about twenty million German refugees and displaced persons who had been deported during the time of the National Socialism. They all needed to find a new home or they had to return to where they came from or rather where they had been expelled from. By 1950, most of the displaced persons had returned to their home country or found another one to stay in. However, at this time it still seemed to be a problem for Germany, which had been reduced in its size, to offer all the returning Germans proper living conditions. Moreover many of the immigrants were suffering discrimination in those days.

When most of the migration caused by the World War had finished, new types of migration started to develop. Before and during the building of the wall between East and West Germany, about 2.7 million people had left the communist German Democratic Republic, the East of Germany, for the West, the Federal Republic of Germany. This process created a weakening of the GDR's demographical structure and a lack of workers as well. Due to this, about 500,000 foreign workers for example from Vietnam, Poland and Mozambique were hired. Yet they were not integrated into society and they were not offered any possibilities of participation. In the 1970s asylum was offered to some thousand refugees from Chile, Greece and Spain by the GDR.

In the 1950s, the economy in the Federal Republic of Germany boomed. Resulting from the deaths and imprisonments caused by the second World War, there were not enough workers for the increasing economy. So the proposal to send some workers from other countries really fit in. It was not, as one could suppose, made by the German government, but by the countries which wanted to send workers. In 1955, Germany and Italy made a contract concerning the deployment of foreign workers. Until the 1960s, the majority of the immigrants came from Italy. Conventions with Spain, Greece, Turkey, Portugal, Morocco, Tunisia and Yugoslavia followed. In 1954, 0.4 % of the workers employed in Germany were from abroad. The number increased to 1.5 % in 1960, which was the first year of full employment. In 1971, there was also a recruitment contract between Germany and England. In September of the same year, more than 10 % of the employees

were foreign workers. Most of them came from Turkey.

The countries who let their population earn money in Germany thus attempted to solve their own problems. With the recruiting contracts, the unemployment in the sending countries decreased and the balance of trade through foreign currencies improved.

The majority of the workers from abroad got jobs in factories or mines. They had to do physically hard labour. The companies preferred to employ unskilled foreign workers because they were cheaper than the Germans. The labourers, who had planned to leave Germany again, came alone and often lived in small flats or hostels. Their families, who stayed in the homeland, got the biggest parts of the pays. Most of the workers wanted to earn enough money to be financially independent and to be able to live a good life in the homeland.

In 1973, Germany stopped the recruitment because of the worsening of the economic situation, especially the oil crisis. All in all, 14 million foreign workers had come to Germany for a period of time. After 1973, eleven million of them had returned to their homelands.

After 1973, more members of migrant worker families moved to Germany. Despite the considerable increase of foreign families in Germany, the early idea that those foreign workers would move back to their homeland after a certain time still existed. That's why the process of integration was never recognized as an important issue. Nevertheless, migrant workers, who were primarily sent to Germany to back up and support the German economy for a short term only, became united with their families and settled in Germany.

Because of the fact that their integration was never seen as an important issue, it became difficult to decide what could be the best way to handle the situation with many cultures in one country. Even today the people with an immigration background are put under pressure to integrate as best as possible. Ever since the first foreign workers moved to Germany and brought new cultures along with new habits and wants to Germany, it felt unfamiliar for the German people. The different opinions, religions or cultures sometimes collide and for that reason prejudices started to arise.

On the one hand German people had difficulties in accepting the foreign workers and their children, but on the other hand there are still some migrant families, who are not able to speak German and don't try to get used to German culture. Many German cities have quarters where

immigrants, mainly from Turkey, live in their own "parallel" society, living their own way of life and speaking nothing but Turkish.

In the last years, the focus of political discussions changed. Through various studies, it has become clear that the third generation of the immigrants suffers from many problems. Especially, they reach only bad school qualifications. The German government has now introduced many different measures to ensure a better integration of immigrants in society. This has become a central issue of German politics.

After 1973, it was only possible for family members to reunite their family in Germany. But other foreign workers had less chances to emigrate to Germany. There was no official policy of recruiting foreign workers until in the year 2000 the government introduced a green card to recruit IT specialists for the struggling German economy. The current immigration laws strongly limit the chances to immigrate to Germany to people with high qualifications.

After Germany was reunited, another form of immigration began. In 1991, a new law was decreed making it easier for people from Eastern Europe who had at least a partial German background to get a German passport. So a lot of people, mainly from the former Soviet Union, came to Germany. By 1996, two million of these "Aussiedler" had come to Germany.

Another source of immigration to Germany were asylum-seekers. Until the early 1990s, a lot of asylum-seekers came to Germany. Not all of them had been politically prosecuted. Some of them had come to Germany for economical reasons. So the government changed the laws, making it a lot harder for refugees to come to Germany.

