

Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe

THEIR DETERMINANTS, VARIATION, AND LACK OF CONVERGENCE

ERIC NEUMAYER

Department of Geography and Environment

London School of Economics and Political Science

and

Centre for the Study of Civil War

International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Norway

Substantial variation in recognition rates for asylum claims from the same countries of origin subjects refugees to unfair and discriminatory treatment. This article demonstrates the extent of variation and lack of convergence over the period from 1980 to 1999 across Western European destination countries. Refugee interest groups also suspect that political and economic conditions in destination countries, as well as the number of past asylum claims, unduly affect recognition rates. This article estimates the determinants of asylum recognition rates. Origin-specific recognition rates vary, as they should, with the extent of political oppression, human rights violations, interstate armed conflict, and events of genocide and politicide in countries of origin. Recognition rates for the full-protection status are lower only in times of high unemployment in destination countries. Such rates are also lower if many asylum seekers from a country of origin have already applied for asylum in the past.

Keywords: *asylum; refugee; recognition rates; convergence; conflict*

From a normative viewpoint, asylum claims should be assessed purely with regards to the merits of the claim. Refugee interest groups and others critical of developed countries' asylum policies argue that adverse political and economic conditions can induce governments to use their influence on the assessment of asylum claims to deter potential future asylum seekers via low recognition rates (European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE] 2000a; Pro-Asyl 2003). They also suggest that recognition rates for prima facie similar asylum claims vary substantially across European Union (EU) and other Western European countries and that this variation subjects asylum seekers to the risk of unfair and discriminatory treatment (Noll 2000).

In this article, we estimate the extent of variation in origin-specific recognition rates for both full refugee and the combined refugee and other allowance-to-remain statuses. We analyze whether there has been convergence in recognition rates over the

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The data and a do-file replicating the reported results are available at <http://www.yale.edu/unsy/jcr/jcrdata.htm>.

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period from 1980 to 1999 across Western European countries, where Western Europe means Norway, Switzerland, and the fourteen countries that formed the EU in 1999 (for Luxembourg, the remaining EU country, no data are available). We find substantial variation together with a lack of convergence. The variation and lack of convergence in recognition rates presents reason for concern. Essentially, it subjects asylum seekers to the danger of arbitrariness in the assessment of their asylum claim, depending on which country of destination their claim is decided upon. This might have been less problematic if asylum seekers could have more or less freely chosen the Western European country in which they filed their asylum claim. Very unequal recognition rates have become extremely problematic since the Dublin Convention from 1997 requires asylum seekers in EU countries to file their claim in the country of first entry. Restrictions on choosing one's preferred asylum destination country—sometimes called somewhat pejoratively *asylum shopping*—subject asylum seekers whose claims carry the same substantive merit to the danger of unequal treatment contingent on where they lodge their asylum claim. Such discriminatory treatment violates the spirit, if not the letter, of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951, to which all Western European countries are bound. It represents a frontal assault on the ethical standards of fairness and nondiscrimination supposedly underlying the process of granting asylum.

We also estimate the determinants of asylum recognition rates. These estimation results provide reason for cautious optimism as recognition rates seem to be fairly sensitive with respect to the likely merit of the asylum claim as recognition rates vary with the extent of political oppression, human rights violations, interstate violent political conflict, and events of genocide and politicide in countries of origin. The recognition rate for the combined full and other allowance-to-remain statuses is insensitive toward economic and political conditions in destination countries. However, the recognition rate for full refugee protection status only is somewhat more vulnerable to factors outside the merits of the asylum claims as both the number of origin-specific past asylum seekers and the unemployment rate in destination countries are negatively associated with this recognition rate. This is in accordance with recent trends of pushing asylum seekers into lower protection statuses in times of economic crises or when destination countries perceive themselves as being overburdened.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: the next section provides some statistical background information on asylum migration to Western Europe, followed by a discussion of why low recognition rates might deter asylum applications. We review existing empirical studies before presenting the research design. The empirical analysis consists of convergence and multivariate regression analysis and is followed by a concluding section discussing the implications of the findings of this study.

ASYLUM MIGRATION TO WESTERN EUROPE

Table 1 provides an overview of the total number of asylum applications being lodged in industrialized countries between 1980 and 1999, averaged over periods of five years. Total applications in Europe increased tremendously from the early 1980s

to the early 1990s, from a total of 592,000 to 2.65 million, falling somewhat during the latter half of the 1990s but staying at a fairly high level of 1.93 million. During this period, Europe received almost three-quarters of all asylum applications lodged in industrialized countries, with the rest mainly going to Northern America. Clearly, these are nonnegligible numbers. On the other hand, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR 2002, 84) estimates that in 1999, only about 28 percent of the estimated 11.6 million refugees worldwide were hosted by developed countries. In other words, while the numbers of asylum seekers coming to developed countries in general and Western Europe in particular have grown substantially, it is developing, not developed, countries that have to cope with the vast majority of refugees.

Within Western Europe, some countries are clearly much more popular than others. Germany, in particular, took by far the largest share during this period, as can also be seen in Table 1—namely, almost one-third of all asylum applications lodged in industrialized countries. Of course, these very large differences can be partly explained by the different sizes of destination countries. If we divide the sum of asylum applications over the period from 1980 to 1999 by population size in 1999, then Switzerland, Sweden, and Austria have had more asylum applications per capita than Germany. Whether in absolute numbers or relative to population size, clearly the richer European countries are the most popular countries for lodging asylum applications.

Where do people lodging asylum applications in Europe mainly come from? Table 2 lists the top thirty countries of origin, averaged over five-year periods between 1980 and 1999. There clearly are changes in the major sending countries over this twenty-year period. For example, during the early 1980s, many asylum seekers came from Eastern European Communist countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. In the 1990s, after the end of the cold war, only negligible numbers of asylum seekers came from these three countries, which have themselves turned into countries of destination, if on a very small scale. Other Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, have remained major sending countries throughout the entire time period, however. Indeed, as a consequence of its civil war, more than 900,000 people from Yugoslavia asked for asylum in Western European countries in the 1990s, making it the top sending country during this decade. Many other countries have similarly been major countries of origin throughout—namely, Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire), India, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey, and Vietnam. It is clear from this table that asylum seekers come mainly from Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Central and South American refugees are much more likely to apply for asylum in the United States.

Asylum seekers from particular countries often have a preferred country of destination, and this need not be the country that is otherwise the most popular country of destination in aggregate terms. For example, the United Kingdom is a major destination for asylum seekers from Nigeria, as is Belgium for Congolese asylum seekers. France attracts more asylum applications from Vietnamese people than the Netherlands (UNHCR 2002). Neumayer (2004) examines the destination choice by asylum seekers in Western Europe and finds that country-specific ties such as a shared language

TABLE 1
Asylum Applications in Industrialized Countries, 1980 to 1999 (in thousands)

<i>Country</i>	<i>1980-1984</i>	<i>1985-1989</i>	<i>1990-1994</i>	<i>1995-1999</i>	<i>1980-1999</i>	<i>Percentage of Total, 1980-1999</i>	<i>1980-1999 per Million Inhabitants</i>
Total	793.83	1495.63	3373.32	2751.78	8414.55		
Northern America	201.16	368.97	673.67	773.27	2017.08	23.97	
Europe, of which:	592.03	1125.17	2650.99	1933.40	6301.59	74.89	
Austria	63.24	64.44	76.16	53.53	257.37	3.06	31.81
Belgium	14.48	32.11	87.02	93.39	226.99	2.70	22.20
Denmark	5.60	29.98	44.78	37.79	118.15	1.40	22.18
Finland	0.07	0.33	11.37	6.92	18.69	0.22	3.62
France	106.34	178.66	184.59	112.26	581.86	6.91	9.93
Germany	249.65	455.25	1337.19	542.41	2584.51	30.71	31.48
Greece	6.44	23.99	12.80	11.81	55.04	0.65	5.22
Italy	11.59	19.64	37.62	48.75	117.59	1.40	2.04
Ireland	—	—	0.52	17.84	18.36	0.22	4.89
The Netherlands	8.78	46.36	151.14	170.39	376.66	4.48	23.83
Norway	0.75	23.20	30.02	24.04	78.01	0.93	17.49
Portugal	4.34	1.27	3.87	1.69	11.17	0.13	1.12
Spain	5.38	15.71	53.10	30.44	104.63	1.24	2.65
Sweden	41.93	97.14	197.01	48.54	384.62	4.57	43.42
Switzerland	29.70	70.31	136.30	146.37	382.69	4.55	53.15
United Kingdom	17.47	28.55	150.85	223.27	420.13	4.99	7.06

SOURCE: Own computations from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2001).

TABLE 2
Top Thirty Countries of Origin Applying for Asylum in Western Europe

	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999
Turkey	90,034	Turkey	Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia
Poland	81,424	Poland	Romania	Turkey
Iran	33,535	Iran	Turkey	Iraq
Sri Lanka	30,067	Sri Lanka	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Afghanistan
Pakistan	29,689	Yugoslavia	Bulgaria	Sri Lanka
Czechoslovakia	25,789	Lebanon	Sri Lanka	Iran
Vietnam	21,478	Ghana	Iraq	Somalia
Ghana	20,632	Romania	Iran	Romania
India	17,452	Congo (Zaire)	Congo (Zaire)	Bosnia-Herzegovina
Romania	16,758	India	Somalia	Herzegovina
Afghanistan	15,557	Pakistan	Afghanistan	Pakistan
Cambodia	15,141	Ethiopia	Vietnam	Congo (Zaire)
Hungary	14,800	Czechoslovakia	Lebanon	Algeria
Ethiopia	12,665	Hungary	India	India
Congo (Zaire)	10,534	Chile	Albania	Armenia
Iraq	10,260	Iraq	Pakistan	China
Lebanon	9,312	Afghanistan	Nigeria	Nigeria
Chile	8,936	Vietnam	Russia	Russia
Lao PDR	8,098	Angola	Ghana	Albania
Yugoslavia	5,078	Somalia	Poland	Georgia
Bangladesh	3,837	Bangladesh	Algeria	Bangladesh
Angola	3,274	Syria	Angola	Vietnam
Haiti	2,925	Bulgaria	Ethiopia	Sierra Leone
Syria	2,533	Cambodia	China	Syria
Egypt	1,925	Lao PDR	Liberia	Bulgaria
Bulgaria	1,864	Mali	Togo	Angola
Armenia	1,271	Nigeria	Bangladesh	Sudan
Albania	1,156	Haiti	Syria	Azerbaijan
Guinea	842	China	Armenia	Ukraine
Gambia	783	Guinea	Peru	Macedonia
				Lebanon

SOURCE: Own computations from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2001).

and former colonial links, as well as geographical proximity, are also statistically significant determinants in addition to a country's income level. That study also finds that once destination countries have allowed significant numbers of asylum seekers from a particular country, this attracts more asylum seekers in the future from this country of origin due to network effects.

Recognition rates for asylum seekers from the same origin countries can vary dramatically across destination countries. For example, in 1999, almost all applications for asylum from Iraqis were successful in the United Kingdom; that is, they were either given full asylum status or were otherwise allowed to remain in the country. In the same year, the success rate was just above 10 percent in the Netherlands. Between these extremes, there is also great variation with, for example, Austria at 28 percent, Germany at 43 percent, France at 59 percent, and Denmark at 83 percent. The success rate of applications from Afghanis in Germany in 1999 was around one-quarter but 67 and 80 percent in Belgium and the Netherlands, respectively. Vietnamese applications were almost all rejected by Germany but faced a success rate of 86 percent in France. These are merely examples from one year, but a similar picture emerges in other years and for applications from many other countries of origin as well. Of course, examples do not demonstrate a systematic pattern. Doing so will be left to the empirical analysis provided further below. The next section discusses the effect that low recognition rates might have on asylum applications.

THE EFFECT OF LOW RECOGNITION RATES ON ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

Table 1 has demonstrated how numbers of asylum seekers coming to Western Europe have increased substantially from 1980 onwards, falling again slightly in the second half of the 1990s. Destination countries have reacted to this increase in numbers with deterrent measures. While there are many ways to deter potential asylum seekers to reduce their numbers—including visa restrictions, carrier sanctions, reductions in welfare benefits, and lists of “safe” third countries of transit—a low recognition rate signals to potential asylum seekers that the chances of their asylum claim becoming accepted are low. A low recognition rate exposes potential future asylum seekers to the risk of being sent back to their country of origin or to other countries of transit that are not their chosen country of destination. Whatever the motivation for leaving one's country of origin in the first place, being sent back or deflected to undesired third countries not only defeats the initial purpose but is also likely to leave the person worse off than in the initial situation, given that scarce financial and other resources have been spent. In cases in which people had fled from genuine persecution in their country of origin, the risk of being imprisoned, tortured, or killed can well increase if their asylum claim is rejected and they are forced to return, drawing additional attention to them. It is exactly for this reason that *non-refoulement* (the prohibition to return refugees to places where their personal integrity is threatened) is at the heart of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Of course, as pointed out by Gibney (2000) and Gibney and Hansen (2002), relatively few of those whose asylum claim becomes rejected are actually made or forced to leave the country. They explain this with a combination of a reluctance to incur the costs of deporting people in terms of time, effort, financial resources, and the likely controversies and conflicts involved, together with an acknowledgment that certain humanitarian reasons stand against deportation. However, even when asylum seekers are allowed to remain in the country despite their claim for full refugee status becoming formally rejected, they often still face reduced rights and benefits compared to others whose asylum claim was formally accepted (DG for Justice and Home Affairs 2001). Low recognition rates also spur a public perception of the vast majority of asylum seekers as “bogus” refugees, even though econometric studies of the determinants of asylum migration to Western Europe dispute the validity of this perception (Neumayer 2005). Such a public climate makes it easier for policy makers to enact other deterrent measures aimed at curbing the seemingly widespread abuse of a supposedly liberal asylum regime (UNHCR 1997).

The deterrent effect of low recognition rates is not only plausible in theory, but it has also been demonstrated in empirical studies. There is casual evidence that, for example, Sri Lankan asylum seekers have reacted to low recognition rates in Germany by seeking asylum in the United Kingdom instead (Robinson and Segrott 2002, 3). Similarly, most key informants in Böcker and Havinga’s (1998) qualitative study of asylum migration to the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom agreed on the deterrent effects of low recognition rates. With respect to more systematic evidence, Vink and Meijerink (2003) claim to have found a strong negative correlation between aggregate recognition rates and the total number of asylum applications filed in EU member states in a log-linear analysis over the period from 1982 to 2001. However, the problem with this study is that other variables, which are likely to influence the number of asylum applications, are not taken into account. The negative correlation between aggregate recognition rates and the number of asylum applications can therefore be entirely spurious. However, another study, which includes many other determinants of the number of asylum applications, also finds a deterrent effect of low recognition rates in Western European countries on their share of asylum seekers (Neumayer 2004). This holds true both for the aggregate recognition rates as well as origin-specific recognition rates over the period from 1982 to 1999. Similarly, Holzer, Schneider, and Widmer (2000a) demonstrate a deterrent effect of low recognition rates in their time-series analysis of asylum applications in Switzerland over the period from 1986 to 1995.

We can therefore conclude that a deterrent effect of low recognition rates on asylum applications is both plausible in theory and demonstrated in empirical studies. As a consequence, it becomes interesting to test whether political and economic conditions in destination countries affect recognition rates or whether recognition rates are mainly determined by the relative merit of asylum applications. Such an analysis is exactly what this article aspires to undertake.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

To our knowledge, the only two existing empirical studies of the determinants of asylum recognition rates are Holzer and Schneider (2001) and Holzer, Schneider, and Widmer (2000b). The latter study analyzes the handling of approximately 180,000 individual asylum applications in Swiss cantons over the period from 1988 to 1996. Holzer, Schneider, and Widmer control for individual characteristics such as age, gender, and marital status of applicants, together with the date of application and dummy variables for the most important countries of origin. Their main interest is in explaining the different chances of asylum seekers with otherwise similar background to have their asylum application recognized in various cantons. In addition to canton fixed effects, explanatory variables included are the size of cantons, linguistic affiliations, salient organizational principles, residents' attitudes toward asylum seekers, and the share of foreigners residing in cantons. They find that, all other things equal, cantons with a centralized asylum administration system have lower recognition rates if the share of resident foreigners and the extent of negative attitudes toward asylum seekers are not controlled for. Once they are, the effect vanishes. Cantons with both a high share of resident foreigners and negative attitudes toward asylum seekers have low recognition rates, but those with a low share of resident foreigners have high recognition rates. Small and large cantons have higher recognition rates than medium-sized ones. Holzer, Schneider, and Widmer conclude from their results that decentralized decision making can represent a threat to certain groups of refugees in terms of discriminatory decision making.

Having access to individual data is very rare, and Holzer and Schneider (2001) have to resort to aggregate data in their analysis of the determinants of asylum recognition rates over the period from 1983 to 1995 for Western European, EU, and fifteen Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. They examine whether recognition rates are influenced by political factors such as the share of foreigners, the political orientation of the government, and the electoral success of right-wing extremist parties, as well as economic factors such as economic growth, inflation, and the unemployment rate. They find that none of these factors has a statistically significant impact. Only the total number of asylum applications exerts a negative impact on recognition rates. They also find evidence for convergence in recognition rates across groups of countries examined.

Our analysis here is similar in spirit to the study by Holzer and Schneider (2001), which also needs to resort to aggregate data due to lack of alternatives. However, contrary to Holzer and Schneider, who look at aggregate recognition rates in destination countries, we use a dyadic research design in which recognition rates are specific to both destination *and* origin countries. This dyadic research design offers two advantages of utmost importance. First, aggregate total recognition rates cannot truly be compared across countries because the origins of asylum seekers and, therefore, the likely merit of their asylum request differ dramatically across destination countries. For example, in the 1990s, asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey went in much higher numbers to Germany than to other countries, whereas Somalis and Sri Lankans went foremost to the United Kingdom (UNHCR 2001). It is therefore

not surprising that aggregate total recognition rates differ across destination countries. Second, the absence of a dyadic research design also implies that Holzer and Schneider cannot estimate any effect that the characteristics of origin countries have on recognition rates. If one wants to assess whether recognition rates vary with the presumed merit of asylum claims, then one needs to look at origin-specific recognition rates. It is of great interest whether the extent of political repression in origin countries, human rights violations, violent political conflict, and the like has a statistically significant impact on recognition rates. The same is true for economic characteristics such as the average income level in origin countries. These questions can be addressed with our research design, which we describe in detail next.

RESEARCH DESIGN

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The theoretically correct recognition rate is the percentage of asylum claims recognized relative to the number of asylum claims lodged. Unfortunately, as many claims are not decided during the period they were lodged, and no data on the application date of most claims are available, this theoretically correct recognition rate cannot be calculated (UNHCR 2002, 58). In its absence, we follow UNHCR practice and compute recognition rates as the number of decisions recognizing asylum claims in any one year relative to the number of claims decided upon. In other words, our recognition rate does not measure the rate of successful applications but the rate of successful decisions.

We analyze two different types of recognition. One is the rate of decisions granting full refugee status according to the 1951 Geneva Convention. The other is the rate of decisions granting either full refugee status or allowance to remain for other, mostly humanitarian, reasons. Unfortunately, data limitations do not allow us to distinguish in greater detail among various protection statuses beyond these two categories. Observers have noted the increasing use of lower protection statuses in substitution for the full refugee protection status according to the standards set by the Geneva Convention (Joly 1999; Noll 2000). It follows that, if existent, we would expect a stronger effect of political and economic conditions in destination countries on the recognition rate for full refugee status than on the combined recognition rate as asylum claims are shifted from the full to the lower protection statuses.

The data have been provided by the UNHCR's statistical unit. At the time of this writing, no data on recognition rates broken down by destination and origin countries were available after 1999, which therefore represents the end period of our study. The data are not without problems. To start with, for some destination countries, the data cover both first-instance and appeal decisions, whereas for other countries, only the first-instance decisions are covered. In some destination countries, cases that are rejected on formal grounds from the start enter the total number of decisions made, whereas in other countries, they do not. In our estimations further below, we deal with this problem with the help of destination fixed effects. In addition, there can be mea-

surement errors. Note that these measurement errors enter the error term in our empirical estimations, which reduces the precision of our estimation results. They do not, however, bias our estimates as we have no reason to believe that the measurement error is systematically correlated with any of our explanatory variables. Also note that, as mentioned above, we have no information on when a claim decided on was actually filed. Decisions in any one year can therefore refer to applications from the same or earlier years. This is not particularly problematic as the merits of an asylum claim also depend on the circumstances in the country of origin at the time of decision making. For example, asylum seekers who fled their countries at a time of large-scale political persecution might be denied asylum recognition if, at the time that their request is decided on, the threat of persecution has disappeared due to a political regime change. The same argument applies vice versa.

For some countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands, for example, there are much fewer gaps in the data on dyad-specific recognition rates than in other countries such as Ireland and Portugal. For Luxembourg, no data were available at all. In general, there are more gaps in the data the further back in time one goes.

THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

To test whether the economic conditions in a destination country have an impact on recognition rates, we include the gross domestic product per capita in constant U.S. dollars of 1997 (GDP p.c.) and the unemployment rate (%UNEMPLOYED) in destination countries. Data are taken from the World Bank (2001) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2003). With respect to political conditions, we want to test whether the share of votes in general national parliamentary elections going to so-called right-wing populist parties such as the Front National in France, the Republikaner in Germany, or the Vlaams Block in Belgium (%RIGHTPOPULIST) might have a negative impact on recognition rates. The classification of parties and data is taken from Swank (2002) and supplemented by Lane, McKay, and Newton (1997). The electoral success of such parties can be understood as a shift of the median voter to the right, and the political economy, in the wake of Downs (1957), predicts that policy makers will respond to such a shift by passing laws and regulations that accommodate such a shift. One likely consequence of such restrictive policies would be a lower recognition rate. In other words, the electoral success of right-wing populist parties often prompts governments and parliaments—no matter what their political orientation—to enact restrictive asylum policies with a view to winning back the voters and eroding the ground on which right-wing populist parties build their success. A good example of this is the July 1993 constitutional change of law in Germany denying the individual right to seek asylum to persons from “safe” countries of origin and those who have passed through “safe” third countries. While the reasons for this constitutional change are manifold, it can be seen as a reaction to rampant hostility and violence against foreigners, particularly asylum seekers, and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties in some of the German states (*Länder*).

To see whether high numbers of asylum applications prompt destination countries to resort to lower recognition rates, we use two variables: (1) the average number of

total asylum seekers in the destination country in the past two to five years, normalized by the destination country population (PASTASYLUMTOTAL p.c.), and (2) the average number of asylum seekers from a specific origin country who have applied to a destination country in the past two to five years, again normalized by destination country population (PASTASYLUMBYORIGIN p.c.). Data are taken from UNHCR (2001). The reason for including both variables is that total asylum numbers might exert downward pressure on all recognition rates, whereas high asylum numbers from specific origin countries might lead to lower recognition rates for asylum claims from these specific countries. We take the average of the past two to five years of these two variables for two reasons.¹ One is to average out coincidental temporary ups and downs. Second, and more important, taking past values deals with the problem that the current number of asylum seekers is endogenous to the current or past recognition rates as we have argued further above. Taking past numbers of asylum seekers therefore avoids the simultaneity bias.

In addition to economic and political characteristics of the destination countries as well as the total number of past asylum applications, we also want to test the impact of conditions in origin countries on recognition rates. To do so, we include the origin country gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity and constant U.S. dollars of 1997 (GDP p.c.). Faced with the paucity of data on unemployment rates, poverty incidence, and the like in countries of origin, this represents our only variable of general economic conditions in countries of origin. Data are taken from the World Bank (2001) as the primary source and from Summers and Heston (1991) and the World Health Organization (WHO 2000) as supplementary sources.

To measure political oppression, we constructed an autocracy variable as the unweighted sum of the political rights and civil liberties index (AUTOCRACY), published by Freedom House (2002). In this source, political rights refer to, for example, the freedom to organize in political parties or groupings, the existence of party competition and an effective opposition, and the existence and fairness of elections, including the possibility to take over power via those elections. Civil liberties refer to, for example, the freedom of the media, the right to open and free discussions, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of religious expression, the protection from political terror, and the prevalence of the rule of law. The two indices are based on surveys among experts assessing the extent to which a country effectively respects political rights and civil liberties, both measured on a 1 (*best*) to 7 (*worst*) scale.

As a measure of human rights violations (RIGHTS VIOLATION), we use the two Purdue Political Terror Scales (PTS). One of the two PTS is based on a codification of country information from Amnesty International's annual human rights reports, with a scale ranging from 1 (*best*) to 5 (*worst*). Analogously, the other scale is based on information from the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.² The simple average of the two scales was used for the present study. If one index

1. At the start of the panel, this variable goes back fewer years to avoid a five-year loss of observations.

2. Codification is according to rules as follows: "1. Countries . . . under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their views, and torture is rare or exceptional. . . . Political murders are extraordinarily rare. 2. There is a limited amount of imprisonment for non-violent political activity. However, few are affected, torture and beatings are exceptional. . . . Political murder is rare. 3. There is extensive political

TABLE 3
Summary Descriptive Variable Information

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
RECOGNITION RATE (combined statuses)	10,290	0.29	0.35	0.00	1.00
RECOGNITION RATE (full-protection status only)	10,290	0.19	0.30	0.00	1.00
PASTASYLUMTOTAL p.c.	10,290	1.19	1.14	0.01	4.95
PASTASYLUMBYORIGIN p.c.	10,290	0.02	0.08	0.00	2.68
ln GDP p.c. (destination country)	10,290	9.95	0.18	9.30	10.26
%UNEMPLOYED	10,290	8.33	4.37	0.40	24.20
%RIGHTPOPULIST	10,290	4.85	5.69	0.00	23.00
ln GDP p.c. (origin country)	10,290	7.80	0.87	6.00	10.15
AUTOCRACY	10,290	9.85	3.32	2.00	14.00
RIGHTS VIOLATION	10,290	3.21	1.09	1.00	5.00
EXTWAR	10,290	0.20	0.71	0.00	3.00
DOMWAR/STATEFAIL	10,290	0.96	1.42	0.00	5.00
GEN/POLITICIDE	10,290	0.24	0.94	0.00	5.50

NOTE: For definitions of variables, see text.

was unavailable for a particular year, the other one available was taken over for the aggregate index. Data are taken from Gibney (2002).

Threats to personal integrity stemming from events of civil and ethnic wars as well as the collapse of state authority (DOMWAR/STATEFAIL) are measured by the maximum of magnitude scores, each measured on a 0 to 4 scale, as coded for such events by the U.S. State Failure Task Force Project. For civil and ethnic wars, the magnitude refers to the portion of the country affected by fighting, whereas for state failure, the magnitude refers to the extent of failure of state authority. Data are taken from Marshall, Gurr, and Harff (2001). In addition, we use a magnitude score measuring the annual number of deaths from genocide and politicide (GEN/POLITICIDE) from the same source.³ Genocide and politicide are defined as the calculated physical destruction of a communal or political group in whole or part (Harff and Gurr 1988).

With respect to interstate war, we constructed a variable measuring the extent of external armed conflict (EXTWAR) based on data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (Gleditsch et al. 2002). We prefer this data set to the well-known Correlates of War data set (Singer 2003) because it has a lower minimum threshold of 25 casualties for coding an event as a violent conflict as opposed to the 1,000-casualty threshold of

imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without trial, for political views is accepted. . . . 4. The practices of Level 3 are expanded to larger numbers. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. . . . In spite of its generality, on this level violence affects primarily those who interest themselves in politics or ideas. 5. The violence of Level 4 has been extended to the whole population. . . . The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.”

3. We add 0.5 to the original score to distinguish the absence of such events from the presence of such events with an annual number of deaths of less than 300.

TABLE 4
Bivariate Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. RECOGNITION RATE (combined statuses)												
2. RECOGNITION RATE (full status only)	0.757											
3. PASTASYLUMTOTAL p.c.	-0.106	-0.206										
4. PASTASYLUMBYORIGIN p.c.	0.039	-0.023	0.163									
5. %RIGHTPOPULIST	-0.048	0.031	0.104	0.045								
6. %UNEMPLOYED	0.036	0.073	-0.384	-0.105	-0.231							
7. ln GDP p.c. (destination)	-0.126	-0.163	0.487	0.077	0.466	-0.561						
8. ln GDP p.c. (origin)	-0.041	-0.015	0.014	0.105	-0.005	-0.041	-0.003					
9. AUTOCRACY	0.292	0.266	-0.104	0.002	-0.059	0.024	-0.121	-0.401				
10. RIGHTS VIOLATION	0.252	0.178	-0.067	0.062	-0.005	0.011	-0.054	-0.240	0.425			
11. EXTWAR	0.101	0.103	-0.096	0.006	-0.046	-0.015	-0.079	-0.115	0.107	0.238		
12. DOMWAR/STATEFAIL	0.171	0.099	-0.027	0.014	-0.006	0.018	-0.042	-0.191	0.246	0.602	0.171	
13. GEN/POLITICIDE	0.157	0.139	-0.086	-0.002	-0.035	-0.003	-0.062	-0.152	0.229	0.309	0.230	0.463

NOTE: For definitions of variables, see text.

the Correlates of War project. The variable was coded as 0 if there was either no armed conflict on the territory of a country or armed conflict below the minimum threshold of 25 casualties. It was coded as 1 if there was a minor armed conflict, defined as any type of armed conflict resulting in more than 25 but less than 1,000 casualties in any one year. The variable was coded as 2 if the conflict was of intermediate nature, defined as at least 25 but less than 1,000 casualties in any one year, in addition to an accumulated total of at least 1,000 deaths. Three is the code for large conflicts, which require more than 1,000 battle deaths in a single year to qualify. Note that the reference point for coding is whether the conflict takes place on the territory of a country, whereas a conflict is not coded for a country participating in a conflict outside its own territory.

Table 3 provides summary descriptive variable information, and Table 4 presents a bivariate correlation matrix. Clearly, with very few exceptions, bivariate correlations are not very high. In addition, variance inflation factors were computed for the regression models reported below without country fixed effects, which were all well below 2.5. Together, this suggests no reason to be concerned about multicollinearity.

ESTIMATION TECHNIQUE

We estimate the following model:

$$y_{ijt} = \alpha + \beta_1 x_{ijt} + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \text{ where } \varepsilon_{ijt} = u_i + w_j + v_{ijt}. \quad (1)$$

The subscript i represents each destination country, the subscript j represents each country of origin in year t , and y is the recognition rate. The vector x contains the explanatory variables. The u_i represents individual unobserved or latent destination country effects. The w_j represents individual unobserved origin country effects. The country-specific fixed effects are included in some of the regressions reported below to ensure that any time-invariant aspect of destination and origin countries is controlled for, such that correlation of the explanatory variables with the fixed effects does not bias our estimations. The v_{ijt} is a stochastic error term.

We estimate our model with ordinary least squares (OLS). We employ standard errors that are fully robust toward arbitrary autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity and adjusted for the clustering of observations (i.e., observations are merely assumed to be independent across, but not necessarily within, destination countries).

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

CONVERGENCE IN ASYLUM RECOGNITION RATES?

Before estimating the determinants of recognition rates, we first want to analyze their extent of variation and whether we observe convergence over time. Following Noll (2000, 233-5), there are two reasons why one might expect little variation in recognition rates across EU and other Western European countries. First, all Western European countries are parties to the Geneva Convention, the European Convention

on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention against Torture. They are therefore subject to the same formal obligations with respect to the treatment of asylum claims. In reality, however, we observe substantial differences in the interpretation by developed countries of their formal obligations. Second, the competition among potential destination countries induces the more popular countries to seek harmonization with other countries to share the burden of asylum seeking. In reality, however, only limited actual harmonization has taken place with respect to the standards of asylum recognition. This is despite the 1996 joint position on the harmonized application of the definition of the term *refugee* in article 1 of the Geneva Convention (OJ [1996] L63), the 2000 communication from the European Commission called “Towards a Common Asylum Procedure” (COM [2000] 755), and similar follow-up attempts at harmonization. It is also in line with the resistance of the less popular asylum destination countries against more general harmonization and burden-sharing efforts (Neumayer 2004). Indeed, with the exception of Sweden, no country changed its legislation in the period of our study following the nonbinding joint position (Noll 2000, 239). Even if it were binding, the joint position does not provide conclusive guidance on such important questions as persecution by nonstate actors and the role of safe areas in countries of origin (so-called internal flight alternatives) for the recognition of asylum claims.

In the following, we will therefore analyze to what extent recognition rates vary across Western European countries and whether they are converging over time.⁴ As a measure of variation, we take the so-called coefficient of variation (CV). This coefficient is defined as

$$CV = \frac{\frac{1}{N} \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^N (X_i - \bar{X})^2}}{\bar{X}},$$

where N is the number of destination countries, X_i is the relevant recognition rate of country i , and \bar{X} is the arithmetic mean across destination countries. Note that the numerator is nothing else but the standard deviation. A value of zero would indicate no variation, and higher values would indicate greater variation. A decreasing CV over time indicates convergence, whereas an increasing CV signals divergence.

It is tempting to undertake this or a similar analysis with respect to total aggregate recognition rates, as in Holzer and Schneider (2001), for example. However, such an analysis would be misleading. This is because the allocation of asylum seekers from specific countries of origin is not even across destination countries. One therefore needs to analyze origin-specific recognition rates. Unfortunately, this leads to a great many origin-specific CVs—namely, as many as there are countries of origin. To arrive at some aggregate picture, the origin-specific CVs can be averaged. This can be done in either of two ways: (1) as the simple arithmetic mean or (2) as a weighted average in which the weights are determined by the relative importance of origin countries in

4. The results reported below are hardly affected if one excluded Norway and Switzerland from the analysis and thereby restricted the sample to European Union (EU) countries only.

TABLE 5
Coefficient of Variation Analysis of Recognition Rates

Year	Recognition Rates (Combined)		Recognition Rates (Full-Protection Status Only)	
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
1980	0.80	1.24	0.85	1.27
1981	0.61	0.72	0.65	0.76
1982	0.91	0.69	0.97	0.76
1983	0.99	0.78	1.00	0.83
1984	1.06	0.78	1.09	0.85
1985	1.04	0.95	1.07	1.04
1986	1.18	0.94	1.25	1.12
1987	1.30	0.97	1.42	1.16
1988	1.25	1.06	1.33	1.11
1989	1.31	1.15	1.40	1.28
1990	1.34	1.24	1.67	1.63
1991	1.42	1.37	1.68	1.55
1992	1.43	1.38	1.64	1.75
1993	1.60	1.42	1.78	1.66
1994	1.47	1.12	1.69	1.52
1995	1.41	0.99	1.76	1.49
1996	1.40	1.11	1.75	1.56
1997	1.34	1.02	1.70	1.46
1998	1.27	0.89	1.72	1.38
1999	1.36	0.86	1.70	1.29

terms of the number of asylum seekers from a country of origin divided by the total number of asylum seekers. The latter is perhaps more appropriate as one might be more concerned about variation and lack of convergence in recognition rates of important sending countries than of countries from which hardly any asylum seekers come from. As Table 2 has shown, there are enormous differences in the number of asylum seekers across various countries of origin.

Table 5 provides estimates of the average CV for both the recognition rate for full refugee status and the recognition rate for the combined refugee and other allowance-to-remain statuses applying both methods. Clearly, there is substantial variation in recognition rates across Western European countries. By and large, variation is less if recognition rates are weighted by the relative importance of origin countries. In other words, for the substantively more important groups of asylum seekers, there is slightly less variation. On the whole, there is also more variation in the recognition rate for full refugee status than for recognition rates for the combined refugee and other allowance-to-remain statuses. Interestingly, there is no indication for convergence of either rate, whether weighted or not, over the period of study. In conclusion, therefore, there is great variation in recognition rates that has not shrunk over time.

DETERMINANTS OF RECOGNITION RATES

We now want to analyze the determinants of variation in recognition rates. We start with the recognition rate for the combined full refugee and other allowance-to-remain statuses and a model that contains neither origin- nor destination-specific fixed effects. We then add destination- and origin-specific effects. Finally, from this last model, we drop all insignificant variables to check the stability of results.

Table 6 provides estimation results. As mentioned, in column 1, no fixed effects are included. Neither the aggregate nor the origin-specific past number of asylum claims in a destination country has a statistically significant impact on recognition rates. The same is true for political and economic conditions in the destination country. With respect to conditions in countries of origin, asylum applications from poorer countries have a lower recognition rate. The political conditions in origin countries also matter. The recognition rate is higher for asylum claims from countries that are more autocratic, have a higher incidence of human rights violations, experience a greater level of interstate violent conflict, and have a greater incidence of genocide and politicide events. The extent of civil war and state failure is not significant, however. In column 2, we add both destination- and origin-specific fixed effects to the model. The results are remarkably consistent. The only major changes are that, conditional on the fixed effects, the income level of the country of origin no longer has any statistically significant influence on the recognition rate, whereas higher income levels in destination countries are associated with lower recognition rates. The interpretation with respect to the income level in origin countries is that asylum applications from poorer countries face lower recognition rates because, in the absence of fixed effects, the results draw on both cross-sectional and over-time variation. But rates do not become higher as countries achieve higher income levels over time, a conclusion derived from the fixed-effects estimation, which draws on the over-time variation within countries only. The interpretation with respect to the income level in destination countries is not so clear-cut. This is because the fixed effects also control for differences in statistical classification and legal definition. Cross-sectional differences between poorer and richer destination countries might well exist, but they could be masked by such differences if we do not control for destination-specific fixed effects. In column 3, we drop all the variables that were statistically insignificant in column 2. All the remaining variables perform as before. If the per capita income level of the origin country, which was significant in column 1, is also included, it remains insignificant as in column 2, and the other variables are hardly affected (results not shown).

Estimation results for the recognition rate for full refugee status only are reported in Table 7. We start again with a model that does not contain any fixed effects. Results are broadly similar to the ones for the combined statuses. Recognition rates are positively associated with a destination country's per capita income level. They are higher for richer countries of origin, implying that asylum seekers from poorer countries face lower recognition rates. Political repression, human rights violation, external armed conflict, and episodes of genocide and politicide all raise the recognition rate, whereas the extent of civil war is again insignificant. Inclusion of destination and origin country fixed effects leads to the results reported in column 2. As with the combined sta-

TABLE 6
 Estimation Results for Recognition Rates (Full Recognition and Other Allowance)

	1	2	3
Destination-specific variables			
PASTASYLUMTOTAL p.c.	-0.013 (0.63)	-0.008 (0.31)	
PASTASYLUMBYORIGIN p.c.	0.139 (1.34)	0.059 (0.86)	
ln GDP p.c.	-0.163 (0.92)	-0.582 (4.22)**	-0.594 (4.74)**
%UNEMPLOYED	-0.002 (0.37)	-0.003 (0.26)	
%RIGHTPOPULIST	0.000 (0.08)	0.000 (0.09)	
Origin-specific variables			
ln GDP p.c.	0.040 (5.80)**	-0.023 (0.62)	
AUTOCRACY	0.026 (11.02)**	0.019 (5.04)**	0.021 (6.12)**
RIGHTS VIOLATION	0.042 (6.31)**	0.034 (6.65)**	0.029 (5.90)**
EXTWAR	0.015 (2.20)*	0.021 (3.33)**	0.020 (3.35)**
DOMWAR/STATEFAIL	0.004 (0.54)	-0.006 (0.71)	
GEN/POLITICIDE	0.020 (3.51)**	0.021 (3.02)**	0.019 (2.66)*
Destination dummy variables			
AUSTRIA		-0.040 (0.41)	-0.024 (1.87)
BELGIUM		0.161 (10.30)**	0.163 (10.25)**
DENMARK		0.312 (11.11)**	0.320 (19.59)**
FINLAND		0.062 (0.94)	0.049 (12.61)**
FRANCE		0.034 (0.78)	0.036 (7.50)**
GERMANY		-0.122 (4.28)**	-0.130 (18.19)**
GREECE		-0.259 (5.57)**	-0.256 (4.84)**
IRELAND		-0.026 (0.57)	-0.014 (0.62)
ITALY		-0.002 (0.03)	0.001 (0.09)
THE NETHERLANDS		-0.048 (1.18)	-0.053 (4.86)**

(continued)

TABLE 6 (continued)

	1	2	3
NORWAY		0.043 (0.68)	0.050 (1.57)
PORTUGAL		-0.282 (6.67)**	-0.257 (5.46)**
SPAIN		-0.133 (0.69)	-0.207 (5.82)**
SWEDEN		0.150 (2.07)	0.136 (20.36)**
SWITZERLAND		0.101 (0.92)	0.132 (3.76)**
UNITED KINGDOM		0.074 (2.65)*	0.054 (2.74)*
Observations	10,290	10,290	12,168
R ²	0.13	0.63	0.57

NOTE: Absolute *t*-values in parentheses. Standard errors robust toward arbitrary autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity. Origin country-specific fixed effects are included in regressions 1 and 3, but coefficients are not reported. Observations are assumed to be clustered within destination countries. For definitions of variables, see text.

*Statistically significant at .05 level. **Statistically significant at .01 level.

tuses, the per capita income level of the country of origin is no longer statistically significant in this model. Contrary to column 1, a higher number of country-specific past asylum seekers is associated with a lower recognition rate. Another difference to the results without fixed effects is that a higher unemployment rate in the destination country is associated with a lower recognition rate. If we exclude the insignificant variables from this model, then results on the remaining variables are hardly affected (column 3). If, in addition, we include the per capita income of origin countries, which was significant in column 1, then results hardly change, and this additional variable is insignificant, as in column 2 (results not shown).

In our reported results, the destination-specific dummy variables are estimated as differences from the average. In other words, they show how much each country's recognition rate, averaged across all origin countries, differs from the average of Western European countries *after* controlling for variation in the explanatory variables. These differences must be interpreted with care. First, as stated already, they are averages across origin countries. Second, they cannot be interpreted directly as differences in the generosity of destination countries because, as noted above, they also capture differences in the coverage of what decisions are included in the statistics. Third, they are contingent on the effect of the explanatory variables included in the model. Nevertheless, these qualifications notwithstanding, one salient feature is the substantial disparity in estimated country fixed effects, which supports the results from the coefficient of variation analysis above.

TABLE 7
 Estimation Results for Recognition Rates (Full Recognition Only)

	1	2	3
Destination-specific variables			
PASTASYLUMTOTAL p.c.	-0.033 (2.00)	-0.012 (0.89)	
PASTASYLUMBYORIGIN p.c.	-0.071 (1.19)	-0.104 (2.14)*	-0.110 (2.47)*
ln GDP p.c.	-0.221 (1.27)	-0.549 (4.07)**	-0.648 (7.40)**
%UNEMPLOYED	-0.001 (0.33)	-0.012 (2.30)*	-0.014 (2.65)*
%RIGHTPOPULIST	0.006 (1.82)	-0.002 (0.60)	
Origin-specific variables			
ln GDP p.c.	0.040 (6.36)**	0.018 (0.67)	
AUTOCRACY	0.023 (8.31)**	0.017 (5.43)**	0.017 (4.97)**
RIGHTS VIOLATION	0.020 (2.67)*	0.025 (3.80)**	0.019 (3.36)**
EXTWAR	0.020 (3.09)**	0.024 (5.60)**	0.021 (4.77)**
DOMWAR/STATEFAIL	-0.006 (1.33)	-0.008 (1.42)	
GEN/POLITICIDE	0.021 (4.24)**	0.030 (5.81)**	0.029 (5.41)**
Destination dummy variables			
AUSTRIA		-0.074 (1.51)	0.035 (1.57)
BELGIUM		0.286 (17.09)**	0.292 (19.12)**
DENMARK		0.032 (2.57)*	0.024 (2.42)*
FINLAND		-0.103 (3.49)**	-0.080 (3.96)**
FRANCE		0.175 (7.77)**	0.172 (11.59)**
GERMANY		-0.021 (1.69)	-0.020 (3.56)**
GREECE		-0.187 (4.46)**	-0.211 (6.03)**
IRELAND		0.046 (1.20)	0.078 (5.69)**
ITALY		0.138 (7.34)**	0.156 (10.47)**
THE NETHERLANDS		-0.102 (5.19)**	-0.097 (11.03)**

(continued)

TABLE 7 (continued)

	1	2	3
NORWAY		-0.044 (2.06)	-0.046 (2.20)*
PORTUGAL		-0.253 (5.27)**	-0.263 (5.98)**
SPAIN		0.005 (0.09)	0.024 (0.38)
SWEDEN		-0.061 (2.50)*	-0.082 (6.51)**
SWITZERLAND		0.081 (2.66)*	0.075 (2.52)*
UNITED KINGDOM		-0.065 (5.46)**	-0.057 (6.89)**
Observations	10,290	10,290	10,801
R^2	0.14	0.57	0.57

NOTE: Absolute *t*-values in parentheses. Standard errors robust toward arbitrary autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity. Origin country-specific fixed effects are included in regressions 1 and 3, but coefficients are not reported. Observations are assumed to be clustered within destination countries. For definitions of variables, see text.

*Statistically significant at .05 level. **Statistically significant at .01 level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The existence of substantial variation in origin-specific recognition rates, together with the lack of convergence in recognition rates over time across the Western European countries, presents substantial reason for concern. The restrictions on the choice of asylum destination country introduced in the wake of the Dublin Convention can only be justified if asylum seekers can broadly expect equal and fair treatment no matter where their asylum claim is processed. As we have seen, such treatment is not guaranteed. While there are many different aspects to the processing of an asylum claim, whether the claim is finally recognized represents a very important feature to the asylum seeker. This analysis has demonstrated that Western European countries have still a long way to go before they offer anything resembling a unified or at least convergent chance of recognizing asylum claims that, *prima facie*, appear to be the same in terms of merit.

Future research needs to address the reasons for lack of convergence. Western European countries have tried and, to a great extent, succeeded in converging other aspects of their asylum procedures. For example, substantial convergence has been achieved with respect to lists of "safe" third countries, "safe" origin countries, visa restrictions, sanctions against airlines bringing in passengers without valid visas, and the like (Böcker and Havinga 1998; Havinga and Böcker 1999; Schuster 2000; Noll 2000; Gibney and Hansen 2002). More limited convergence has been achieved for the conditions of reception and the rights and obligations that asylum seekers face once

they are allowed into the asylum application process. Why does convergence not extend to recognition rates?

Strictly speaking, the great extent of variation in origin-specific recognition rates across destination countries is no conclusive proof for unequal treatment. As UNHCR (2002, 46) points out, "Divergent recognition rates for the same nationality during the same period may well be explained when the detailed profile of the individual claimant is taken into account." However, it is most unlikely that vast differences in recognition rates exist because individuals whose asylum claims carry low merit apply in one destination country, whereas other individuals from the same country but whose asylum claims carry high merit apply in another destination country.

Bronkhorst (1991, 151) concludes that "asylum decisions in Western Europe are highly arbitrary." The German refugee interest group Pro-Asyl (2000) similarly argues that, in the face of substantial cross-country differences in asylum recognition rates, the chances of becoming recognized as a refugee or otherwise being allowed to remain in the country resemble a lottery where the odds of winning are contingent on the country in which the claim is processed. Such damning verdicts are understandable given the wide variation in recognition rates across Western European countries. But our analysis of the determinants of recognition rates has shown that there is also another aspect of the recognition process that provides more ground for cautious optimism. Both types of recognition rates are influenced by political conditions in origin countries in terms of regime type, extent of human rights violations, interstate violent political conflict, and events of genocide and politicide. Neither type of recognition rate is influenced by the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. The recognition rate for the combined statuses is also not lower in times of poor economic conditions in destination countries. Higher numbers of past asylum seekers, either in terms of aggregate or specific numbers for origin countries, also do not put downward pressure on the combined recognition rate.

This optimism needs to be qualified, however, for a number of reasons. First, for both the full and the combined recognition statuses, rates of recognition are lower for asylum seekers coming from poorer countries, unless country-specific fixed effects are included in the analysis. This suggests that those coming from poorer countries will find it harder to convince the decision authorities that their claim of persecution is genuine and that they are not merely economic migrants.

Second, the recognition rate for full refugee status is somewhat more vulnerable to an influence outside the merit of the asylum claim as both a higher unemployment rate and a higher origin-specific number of past asylum seekers are associated with a lower recognition rate. That the recognition rate for full refugee status is more vulnerable to such conditions is in accordance with the observation that destination countries tend to shift asylum seekers into statuses with lower protection levels when unemployment rates are high and the perception of being overburdened by asylum seekers is popular.

Third, recognition rates do not vary with the extent of civil war and state failure in origin countries. Only more qualitative future research can show why this is the case. One reason could be that many destination countries are reluctant to accept persecution by nonstate agents as valid grounds for asylum (ECRE 2000b), and such nonstate agent persecution is particularly likely in civil war and state failure events. A joint

position paper of the Council of the European Union (1996, para. 6) states that “reference to a civil war or internal or generalized armed conflict and the dangers which it entails is not in itself sufficient to warrant the grant of refugee status. Fear of persecution must in all cases . . . be individual in nature.”

Fourth, another reason for caution is that our variables or estimation methods might fail to detect more subtle influences of economic and political conditions in destination countries on recognition rates. Even if we take our results on recognition rates at face value, other aspects of the asylum process such as the reception conditions and the generosity of welfare benefits to asylum seekers are likely to be subject to political and economic conditions in destination countries.

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