

Research impact: making a difference

Ensuring fair and humane asylum policies in the EU

LSE research influenced policies to equalise the burden of a rapidly expanding refugee population within the European Union

What was the problem?

Six million asylum seekers have entered Europe over the past two decades. In 2013 nearly 500,000 people requested asylum within the European Union, a rise of nearly 30% on 2012.

The European Union has stated its commitment to a Common European Asylum System, but the extent of member states' individual responsibilities has been fiercely debated.

In 2013, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Italy received 70 per cent of applications, with Sweden taking in almost 20% of the refugees at a cost of over \$1 billion annually.

Some states, notably Malta, have protested the uneven distribution of asylum seekers and called for European solidarity and a fairer distribution of burden-sharing.

What did we do?

Dr Eiko Thielemann, Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Policy and Director of LSE's Migration Studies Unit (MSU), has conducted research in three main areas: fairer burden-sharing of refugees, the effectiveness of the European Refugee Fund, and physical relocation of asylum seekers.

Thielemann demonstrated that the European Union's attempts to achieve fairer burden-sharing of refugees through policy harmonisation have been fundamentally flawed. Unequal distribution of asylum seekers will always exist while certain European states are more attractive to asylum seekers than others (for historical, geographic and other reasons). Many EU initiatives have ignored this uneven distribution, thereby undermining the goal of burden-sharing and the potential for equalising state contributions through policy tools such as financial incentives and relocation strategies.

Thielemann's analysis of the European Refugee Fund (ERF), a pan-European Fund established in 2000 to guarantee fair asylum and resettlement procedures, led to a special issue of the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, which he co-edited, and a European parliamentary report, which he co-authored.

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Thielemann found that the European Refugee Fund is ineffective as a financial compensation tool since the distribution of funds is calculated on absolute numbers of refugees and not on the size of the receiving state. Since the principal beneficiaries of the Fund (large countries) have the most to lose from policy harmonisation, the Fund's allocation rules actively inhibit and undermine burden-sharing.

The European Parliamentary report proposed a new 'capacity-based funding model' (funds distributed relative to a state's size and capacity) rather than the existing 'per application' model (funds distributed according to absolute numbers of refugees) and argued that only physical relocation of asylum seekers would significantly improve cost distribution.

Thielemann found that the Dublin II Regulation – the EU's principal instrument for physical relocation of asylum seekers – allocates the ultimate responsibility for asylum seekers to the Member State through which they first entered the Union. This encourages burden-shifting towards Member States located on the external borders of the European Union. The research also found that voluntary relocation schemes are ineffectual and that automatic relocation of refugees, based on states' capacities, is necessary.

What happened?

Impact on debate

Thielemann has influenced policy debate by contributing to three major European Union reports on migration, in particular as one of the lead authors of the 2010 report on asylum burden-sharing for the European Parliament.

Dr Thielemann served as a Special Rapporteur for EU burden-sharing initiatives at the inter-ministerial conference on Justice and Home Affairs (2010), leading to a renewed impetus to address solidarity issues in the negotiations of the EU's new legislative asylum package.

Thielemann gave evidence on relocation initiatives to the all-party working group on asylum at the European Parliament and to several workshops organised by the intergovernmental European Migration Network.

Two of Thielemann's publications were cited by the UK immigration minister in his written response to a parliamentary question on asylum management (2009). In 2010, Thielemann was asked by the UK's Chief Scientific Advisor to write

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a paper on the effectiveness of migration policy for the Foresight report on Global Environmental Migration (with this report cited by the BBC as the most detailed study on the effect of rising sea levels on human migration).

Impact on Policies

At least four key outcomes were produced as a result of the policy recommendations of Thielemann and MSU:

1. In 2007 the European Commission recognised publicly that the establishment of a common asylum procedure would not eradicate the draw of 'pull' factors on asylum seekers and, hence, the desirability of certain Member States as a place to settle over others. It accepted Thielemann's finding that more effective burden-sharing mechanisms needed to be established to achieve the EU's goals in this area.
2. The European Commission responded to the MSU's criticism of the European Refugee Fund and, in its 2007 Green Paper, accepted the need for reform. The ERF was replaced by the Asylum and Migration Fund and funding was increased. Europe's principal refugee non-governmental organisation (ECRE) also used MSU research to lobby for reform of the Fund's allocation mechanisms, citing Thielemann's 2010 research for the European Parliament.
3. After MSU's criticism of the Dublin mechanism, the EU adopted the Dublin III Regulation (2012) and certain States established EUREMA, a pilot scheme relocating refugees out of Malta. The International Organisation for Migration's report on EUREMA acknowledged Thielemann's research in its foreword.
4. MSU's promotion of new physical relocation systems was noted by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. In 2012, the group convened a refugee relocation conference at the European Parliament and invited Thielemann as principal speaker. This led to a Parliamentary resolution calling on the Commission to include an 'EU distribution key' for guiding the relocation of beneficiaries of international protection in future legislative proposals.

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