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Article

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INFLOWS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS TO OECD COUNTRIES

Every year hundreds of thousands of people leave their homes to flee international or civil conflicts or persecution of minorities. Most of them come from low or middle income countries, and a large share of the people fleeing persecution seek sanctuary elsewhere in their own country or in nearby countries. Those who end up seeking asylum in OECD countries therefore represent just a small fraction of the people who are displaced against their will.

A key instrument in international refugee policy is the *1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Central aspects of the convention still shape refugee policy today. According to the definitions in the convention, a refugee is a person who has fled his or her country or habitual residence because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. An asylum-seeker is an individual that claims to be a refugee and applies for sanctuary in a country. Each claim of refugee status must be considered on its individual merits by the signatory country that the asylum seeker has applied to, and the signatory state has to provide access to procedures for determining whether a person claiming asylum qualifies as a refugee according to the Convention's definition.

The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) collects comprehensive statistics on refugees and asylum seekers. Table 1 depicts the asylum seeker inflows to 19 leading OECD destination countries in 1989–2010. The largest inflows were received by Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada.

The numbers of asylum seekers reflect conflicts and the humanitarian situation in their countries of origin, but there is no uniform trend in inflows of asylum seekers across different countries. Refugee policies also play a role in determining the different trends between countries. Safe third country provisions represent one such policy.

Safe third country provisions are a form of cost shift and inflow control in OECD countries that follow on from the *1990 Dublin Convention*, and were gradually incorporated into the asylum systems of individ-

ual countries. A safe third country is a country that the asylum-seeker has passed through on the way to the receiving country and with which the latter has an agreement. Under an agreement, the receiving country can refuse to examine an asylum application if the country an asylum seeker has passed through is technically responsible for doing so. The purpose of the safe third country policies was to prevent 'asylum shopping', and major recipients of asylum seekers in the EU have generally advocated agreements between the member states to shift some asylum determination responsibilities to other countries.

Safe third country provisions are probably responsible for some of the shift in the distribution of asylum-seekers between countries in the EU, in cases where asylum seekers are more likely to claim asylum from countries that are more easily reachable from outside the EU.

Ilpo Kauppinen

References

OECD, *Trends in International Migration*, SOPEMI 1999, Paris 1999; SOPEMI 2001, Paris 2001; SOPEMI 2002, Paris 2002; SOPEMI 2008, Paris 2008; SOPEMI 2009, Paris 2009, online version (accessed 19 December 2009); SOPEMI 2010, Paris 2010; SOPEMI 2011, Paris 2011.

Table 1

Inflows of asylum seekers, 1989–2010 (in thousands)

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Austria ^{a)}	21.9	22.8	27.3	16.2	4.7	5.1	5.9	7.0	6.7	13.8	20.1	18.3	30.1	39.4	32.4	24.6	22.5	13.3	11.9	12.8	15.8	11.0
Belgium	8.2	13.0	15.4	17.5	26.4	14.4	11.4	12.4	11.8	22.0	35.8	42.7	24.5	18.8	16.9	15.4	16.0	11.6	11.1	12.3	17.2	19.9
Czech Republic		1.8	2.0	0.9	2.2	1.2	1.4	2.2	2.1	4.1	7.2	8.8	18.1	8.5	11.4	5.5	4.2	3.0	1.9	1.7	1.4	0.5
Denmark	4.6	5.3	4.6	13.9	16.5	6.7	5.1	5.9	5.1	9.4	7.1	12.2	12.5	6.1	4.6	3.2	2.3	1.9	1.9	2.4	3.8	5.0
France ^{b)}	61.4	54.8	47.4	28.9	27.6	26.0	20.4	17.4	21.4	22.4	30.9	38.7	54.3	59.0	59.8	58.5	49.7	30.7	29.4	35.4	42.1	47.8
Germany	121.3	193.1	256.1	438.2	322.6	127.2	127.9	116.4	104.4	98.6	95.1	78.6	88.3	71.1	50.6	35.6	28.9	21.0	19.2	22.1	27.6	41.3
Hungary				0.9	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	7.1	11.5	7.8	9.6	6.4	2.4	1.6	1.6	2.1	3.4	3.1	4.7	2.5
Ireland		0.1			0.1	0.4	0.4	1.2	3.9	4.6	7.7	10.9	10.3	11.6	7.9	4.8	4.3	4.3	4.0	3.9	2.7	1.9
Italy ^{b)}	2.3	4.7	31.7	2.6	1.3	1.8	1.7	0.7	1.9	11.1	33.4	15.6	9.6	16.0	13.5	9.7	9.5	10.3	14.1	30.3	17.6	8.2
Netherlands	13.9	21.2	21.6	20.3	35.4	52.6	29.3	22.2	34.4	45.2	42.7	43.9	32.6	18.7	13.4	9.8	12.3	14.5	7.1	13.4	14.9	13.3
Poland				0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8	3.2	3.5	3.4	3.0	4.6	4.5	5.2	6.9	8.1	6.9	4.4	7.2	7.2	10.6	6.5
Spain ^{b)}	4.1	8.6	8.1	11.7	12.6	12.0	5.7	4.7	5.0	6.7	8.4	7.9	9.5	6.3	5.9	5.5	5.3	5.3	7.7	4.5	3.0	2.7
Sweden	30.0	29.4	27.4	84.0	37.6	18.6	9.0	5.8	9.7	12.8	11.2	16.3	23.5	33.0	31.3	23.2	17.5	24.3	36.4	24.4	24.2	31.8
United Kingdom ^{b)}	16.8	38.2	73.4	32.3	28.0	42.2	55.0	37.0	41.5	58.5	71.1	98.9	91.6	103.1	60.1	40.6	30.8	28.3	28.3	31.3	30.7	22.1
Norway	4.4	4.0	4.6	5.2	12.9	3.4	1.5	1.8	2.3	8.4	10.2	10.8	14.8	17.5	16.0	7.9	5.4	5.3	6.5	14.4	17.2	10.1
Switzerland	24.4	35.8	41.6	18.0	24.7	16.1	17.0	18.0	24.0	41.3	46.1	17.6	20.6	26.1	20.8	14.2	10.1	10.5	10.4	16.6	16.0	13.5
Australia	0.5	3.8	16.0	13.4	4.9	6.3	7.6	9.8	9.3	8.2	9.5	13.1	12.4	5.9	4.3	3.2	3.2	3.5	4.0	4.8	6.2	8.3
Canada	19.9	36.7	32.3	37.7	21.1	22.0	26.1	26.1	22.6	23.8	29.4	34.3	44.0	39.5	31.9	25.8	20.8	22.9	28.3	34.8	34.0	23.2
United States ^{c)}	101.7	73.6	56.3	145.5	200.4	144.6	149.1	107.1	52.2	35.9	32.7	40.9	59.4	58.4	43.3	45.0	39.2	41.1	40.4	39.4	38.1	41.0

Empty cells: Data not available. * Preliminary data a) Excluding de facto refugees from Bosnia Herzegovina. b) Excluding accompanying dependents.

c) Excluding accompanying dependents. Fiscal years (October to September of the year indicated). From 1993 on, figures include applications reopened during year.

Sources: OECD, *Trends in International Migration*, SOPEMI 1999, Paris 1999, p. 263; SOPEMI 2001, Paris 2001, p. 280; SOPEMI 2002, Paris 2002, p. 293; SOPEMI 2003, Paris 2003, p. 306; SOPEMI 2004, Paris 2005, p. 315; SOPEMI 2006, Paris 2006, p. 37; SOPEMI 2007, Paris 2007, p. 321; SOPEMI 2008, Paris 2008, p. 315; SOPEMI 2009, Paris 2009, Online version, accessed 19 December 2009; SOPEMI 2010, Paris 2010, p. 281; SOPEMI 2011, Paris 2011, p. 365.