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**Article**

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Chang Woon Nam and Peter Steinhoff

# The Role of Volunteers in German Refugee Crisis and Their Contribution to Local Government Expenditure

In September 2015, Germany implemented a ‘welcoming’ open-door policy toward the refugees who made their way into Europe. However, images of the refugee crisis overwhelmed the country soon when approximately 1 million people came to it in 2015–2016, and many Germans started to question the optimism of the Merkel administration’s ‘*Wir schaffen das*’ (Sola 2018; Jäckle and König 2017). Refugees have disproportionately settled in large German municipalities and cities, due also to better job prospects and social diaspora connections provided there. Eventually these communities – rather than the national government – were expected to solve problems related to accommodation and integration of new arrivals, including: “how to house, educate, train, and integrate individuals from different cultures, with varied education levels, who often need emergency health care and special services” (Katz et al. 2016, 1). Large numbers of individual volunteers have been engaged in a wide range of unpaid activities, from distributing food and medical aid to waiting for refugees in front of the national registration authority, to helping out at refugee shelters, teaching German, and long-term integration assistance. Many of them have also been the ‘spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers’ who are willing to assist community members and civil servants, but lack consistent training (Twigg and Mosel 2017).

Compared to the previous references concentrated on volunteerism in religion, health, environment, and school-related areas (Maki and Snyder 2015), our study tackles a more specific volunteering aspect revealed in the German refugee crisis. Following the investigations of general characteristics of the involved volunteers (gender, age, and income structure; donation types; time requirements), this paper attempts to calculate the monthly personnel and material costs as the opportunity costs of volunteering, which appear to relieve the local government financial bottleneck thanks to such volunteers’ commitment.

High-quality local and regional data on volunteer activities in refugee matters is not yet available in Germany. For this reason, our empirical research adopts the statistics obtained by an online survey conducted among the volunteers in the district of Erding, near Munich. In 2015–2016 Erding was one of the most important initial reception and further distribution centers of refugees who entered Germany. The data was collected based on a questionnaire (with 14 questions) within the period from 15 November 2016 to 15 December 2016. According to the District Office of Erding, the Agency for Work, and the Job Center, the total number of volunteers in this area reached around 450 in December 2016. Among them 130 volunteers took part in the survey. Two major questions included in the survey are related to (1) the types of activities and services which the volunteers in the district of Erding provided; and (2) the scope of time and resources the volunteers invested in their commitment to helping refugees.

## SOME BASIC THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Volunteerism has grown steadily in most developed countries during the past decades and is becoming increasingly more complex at the same time. One of the crucial factors in its expansion is the scheme of collective finance and private provision of key welfare state services, since “volunteers accept to do unpaid work which is performed free of cost in order to benefit the community” (Sajardo and Serra 2011, 873). The theoretical explanation on volunteerism as a substitute for governments’ declining role in providing social services is primarily based on the conventional crowding-out theory of voluntary provision of public goods (Duncan 2004; Freise 2017), combined with a warm-glow philanthropist consumption model (Romano and Yildirim 2001).

The former theory suggests that if people are concerned with the total amount of public service offered, they will treat government spending on such goods and services as substitutes for their own donations to the provision of similar services. Following this logic, Warr (1983) and Roberts (1987) argue that a complete crowding-out is likely to occur (e.g., one dollar of government subsidies will replace one dollar of donations), if donors are pure altruists – i.e., their only concern is the total amount of public goods available (Dehne et al. 2008). The latter warm-glow utility specification additionally introduces a donor’s personal satisfaction derived from her own contribution into the utility function, so that she gets utility not only from the total provision of public goods but also from her own contribution. In this context citizens’ voluntary and charitable activities appear to be stimulated by the ‘intrinsic motivations’ characterized by a ‘prosocial disposition’ toward helping others and communities (Clary et al. 1996; Banuri and Keefer 2016). In this case government spending



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on public goods does not necessarily crowd out private donations one for one, although some degree of crowding-out appears to be still possible (Simmons and Emanuele 2004). These two theories deliver some basic explanations why governments tend to stimulate volunteerism, which can consequently lead to savings in government expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

Volunteering is often perceived as donations of time or labor, but it can also be donations of money or goods. Despite the problems related to the poor availability of data, valuing volunteer time has traditionally been of interest in academic research (Gaskin 1999; Mook et al. 2005), whereas the monetary value of latter types of donation can be more easily obtained. Repeatedly, the calculation of the economic value of volunteering via converting the value of volunteering time into monetary terms is not only a useful device for measuring the contribution made by volunteers to society (Knapp 1990), but also emphasizes that voluntary work can play a significant role for the local and national governments' expenditure behavior and budgetary decision-making.

It is not an easy task, but several methods have been applied to measure a monetary value of the output benefits from the time spent in voluntary work. A possible option is calculating the time spent in an unpaid activity at a 'comparable' market wage. The wage chosen is either (1) the 'opportunity cost' of the time the persons involved in unpaid work could have obtained if they had spent the time in paid work; or (2) the 'specialist wage' that would be needed to pay a specialist from the market to carry out her specific activity; or (3) the so-called 'generalist wage' that a general volunteer would be paid to do the unpaid work. The 'net' opportunity cost widely measures a volunteer's work at the after-tax wage rate, less work-related expenses, plus income by way of employer cost of superannuation and fringe benefits (Ironmonger 2008). Yet such calculations suffer from some weaknesses, since they ignore "that because [many] volunteers do not engage in any paid work, either because they are [retired] or because they have never been part of [active working population, e.g., students or unpaid houseworkers], there is [hardly any suitable market] monetary cost of opportunity. [Secondly,] the value that each volunteer places on her free time is subjective, is hard to compare from one individual to another" (Sajardo and Serra 2011, 881). Furthermore, the voluntary sector is largely endowed with the nonprofessional or amateur nature of its actions, based on the fact that using unpaid (volunteer) labor generates a lower (productivity and efficiency) level of commitment or performance of their tasks (Salamon 1987).

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, studies like Schiff (1985) and Brooks (2003) demonstrate the possibilities of emerging crowding-in effects, highlighting that an increase in government spending on public goods can stimulate an increase in private donations because donors assess the increased spending as a signal that their donations would now be more effective and generate a higher marginal product.

## SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF REFUGEES, COST ALLOCATION AMONG DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT TIERS, AND THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS

In 2015, Germany took in 890,000 refugees and received more than 476,000 formal applications for political asylum. By 2016, however, its government reimplemented the border controls, whereby, thanks to the agreement made between the EU and Turkey in March 2016, Greece was allowed to send back 'irregular migrants' to Turkey, which has made the movement of refugees from the Middle East to Western Europe more difficult. As a consequence, the total number of refugees arriving in Germany in 2016 decreased to 280,000 (Sola 2018). Overall, such an inflow of the refugees within a short time period has led to an increase in German population of more than 1 percent, driven by the arrival of young men particularly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Approximately 65 percent of all asylum seekers between 2015 and 2017 were male; around 50 percent were below the age of 24, and about a quarter of all refugees were children under 15 (Trines 2017).

As soon as asylum seekers register when they arrive in Germany, they are distributed to the individual federal states (*Länder*) using the *Königsteiner* quotas, of which annual calculation is based on the states' tax revenue (rated at two-thirds) and population (with a third share assessed). The difference in surface area among the states is neglected in this context – that is the reason why refugee accommodation is particularly difficult in the city-states of Berlin and Hamburg (Geis and Orth 2016). For the year 2015, the highest *Königsteiner* distribution quota amounted to 21.24 percent for North-Rhine-Westphalia, followed by 15.33 percent for Bavaria, 12.97 percent for Baden-Württemberg, 9.36 percent for Lower Saxony, 7.32 percent for Hesse, 5.10 percent for Saxony, 5.05 percent for Berlin, etc.

Even within the respective states, a separate distribution mechanism exists. In Bavaria, for example, the geographic allocation of refugees occurs based on the ratio to the population of Bavaria, firstly to the administrative districts (*Regierungsbezirke*), and then further on to the districts (*Landkreise*) as well as municipalities and cities (Geis and Orth 2016). Regarding the different shares among the administrative districts in Bavaria, Upper Bavaria is given 33.9 percent of the refugees, followed by Swabia with 14.5 percent, Central Franconia 13.5 percent, Lower Franconia 10.8 percent, Lower Bavaria 9.6 percent, Upper Franconia 8.9 percent, and the Upper Palatinate 8.8 percent. Within the administrative districts, it is once again determined which percentage of the refugees the individual districts and municipalities should receive. Particularly large cities like Munich and Nuremberg stand out, each providing accommodation for one-third of the refugees in their own administrative district.

According to German federalism, the responsibilities for designing, financing, and implementing services for refugees are distributed among the national government, states, and municipalities including cities (Hummel and Thöne 2016). Table 1 suggests that a broad scope of tasks and substantial burdens related to the refugee matters lie at the state and municipal level (Kronenberg 2017). City-states like Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen, “by virtue of their unique status, are required to do double duty, tackling the full array of tasks that would normally be divided between the state and municipal level” (Katz et al. 2016, 14).

More precisely, German large cities and municipalities are assigned to carry out the following tasks in order to effectively integrate new arrivals into society, which include:

- a) Municipalities must provide both short-term housing for asylum seekers and long-term affordable housing possibilities for refugees – a difficult responsibility for large urban areas such as Berlin, Munich, and Hamburg, which already face rapidly growing housing prices and shortage pressure.
- b) Quick integration of refugee children into the public education system is crucial for long-term outcomes. Moreover, working proficiency in the German language is a prerequisite for the economic and social integration.
- c) For working-age adults’ integration, entering the workforce should be achieved as soon as possible, which offers regular income and increases language acquisition.
- d) Refugee populations are at increased risk for serious mental health trauma (including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression) which, if left untreated by appropriate health and medical care, can hinder their integration prospects.
- e) Local authorities must ensure access to services for refugees (e.g., financial services like bank accounts and credit), of which difficulties are caused by language and cultural barriers, in addition to insufficient documentation or status.
- f) Municipal authorities have to maintain a safe and secure environment for both local residents and refugees.

Due to the sharp rise in the number of refugees in 2015, the states and municipalities in Germany were totally overwhelmed (Table 2 for the case of city-state Hamburg) and demanded financial support from the federal government. They initially estimated the total cost of refugees in the states and municipalities at 20 billion euros per year, but foresaw a possible increase up to 30 billion euros in four years. In September 2015, it was agreed that the federal government would provide the states with 670 euros as a monthly flat rate per refugee. The German federal government spent at least 20.8 billion euros on aid to refugees and integration in 2017 (6.4 percent of the total federal government expenditures). In this context, the states and municipalities received around 6.6 billion euros,<sup>2</sup> and almost 7 billion euros went to fighting the causes of flight. In comparison, 20.3 billion euros had been spent on the same purposes in 2016, which accounts for 6.3 percent of the total

federal government expenditures (Bundesfinanzministerium 2018).

In this context it has often been highlighted that the engagement of

<sup>2</sup> In implementation of the federal and state decision on asylum and refugee policy of September 24, 2015, the federal government has provided the following relief for the states and municipalities: (1) subsidy for the expenses for asylum seekers – from registration to the decision by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF); (2) a lump sum of 350 million euros per year for unaccompanied refugee minors; (3) 339 million euros in 2016 and 774 million euros in 2017 for childcare; and (4) 500 million euros in 2016 and 2017 for social housing. In addition, in July 2016, the federal government decided to further support the relief of the states and municipalities with: (5) an integration package of 2 billion euros per year in 2016 and 2017; (6) a total of 1.3 billion euros for accommodation costs for asylum and protection beneficiaries; (7) another 500 million euros for social housing promotion; and (8) 226 million euros for the expansion of day care for children (Bundesfinanzministerium 2018).

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Responsibilities Concerning Refugees among the Different Tiers of Government in Germany**

Government level	Responsibilities
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial registration</li> <li>• Reception and processing of asylum applications</li> <li>• Integration classes</li> <li>• Job market integration</li> <li>• Unemployment welfare</li> </ul>
States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration</li> <li>• Creation and maintenance of initial reception centers and emergency reception centers (initial health check)</li> <li>• School affairs expenses according to asylum welfare bill</li> <li>• Health care for refugees in initial reception centers</li> <li>• Transportation of refugees</li> <li>• Security staff</li> <li>• Initial care and subsequent care of unaccompanied minors</li> </ul>
Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration</li> <li>• Creation of consecutive reception centers</li> <li>• Maintenance of reception centers</li> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• Local integration measures (e.g., through municipal neighborhood houses, sport clubs)</li> <li>• Coordination of volunteer efforts</li> <li>• Transportation of refugees</li> <li>• Security staff</li> </ul>

Source: Katz et al. (2016).

large number of individual volunteers has not only enabled the government to better cope with the refugee crisis but also significantly contributed to the savings of government expenditure in Germany (Katz et al. 2016; TNS Infratest Politikforschung 2016). Karakayali and Kleist (2015) also suggest that the volunteers often fill in the gaps in which the state currently fails to take care, but insist that such volunteers' efforts should ideally be supplements in a form of state-voluntary cooperation – not fully replacing the government's tasks and responsibilities in emergencies (Coule and Bennett 2018).

### VALUE OF VOLUNTARY REFUGEE HELPERS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE: CASE OF ERDING DISTRICT

The Erding district (*Landkreis*), with about 135,000 inhabitants over an area of 870 square kilometers, is located about 30 kilometers northeast of the Bavarian state capital Munich and consists of two cities: Erding (36,000 inhabitants) and Dorfen (14,500 inhabitants), and a further 24 small municipalities. In both 'peak' years, 2015 and 2016, up to 60 refugees per week arrived in the Erding district which operated over 100 refugee shelters at the same time. For example, the vocational school gym in Erding city served as an emergency shelter of the government of Upper Bavaria. In 2017, few new refugees came to the district of Erding. Nevertheless, there were still more than 700 people in the asylum procedure and altogether 1,176 refugees were living there in January 2018. In spite of such a diminishing trend of refugee numbers, 46 civil-servant posts in the district office of Erding are at present directly or indirectly concerned with the management of asylum tasks, which additionally cost more than two million euros per year.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See interview with the District Administrator (*Landrat*) Martin Bayerstorfer – <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/erding/erding-or>

Table 2

#### Costs of Services Delivered to Refugees by Hamburg City-State in 2015

Services	Costs (in million euros)
• Creation and maintenance of initial reception centers and emergency reception centers	147.4
• Health care for refugees in initial reception centers	6.8
• Health care for refugees in consecutive reception centers	45.0
• Transportation of refugees	0.3
• Security staff	20.1
• Creation of consecutive reception centers	126.0
• Maintenance of reception centers	37.3
• School affairs	32.0
• Expenses according to asylum welfare bill <sup>a</sup>	63.6
• Initial care and consecutive care of unaccompanied minors	107.7
• Total	586.2 <sup>b</sup>

Note: <sup>a</sup> In Germany asylum seekers are currently entitled to 15 months of asylum welfare, which includes a monthly allowance of 135 euros per single adult living in a reception center plus the costs of food and housing (see *Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz*). <sup>b</sup> This sum is equivalent to approximately 5% of Hamburg's total government expenditure in 2015.

Source: Hamburg City Government; Katz et al. (2016).

The characteristics of many refugee helpers in the district of Erding match relatively well with those of the so-called 'super-volunteers', defined as well-educated individuals aged 60+ who volunteer 10 or more hours per week (Einolf and Yung 2018). The following similarities and differences of major characteristics can be identified when they are compared to those of the nationwide findings in Karakayali and Kleist (2015) based on 460 samples:

- The dominance of female volunteers prevails also in Erding district (with a share of more than 65 percent of survey participants).
- In the district of Erding a large share of voluntary work (56.3 percent) is also carried out by the individuals with a net income of more than 1,500 euros per month. A further 14.7 percent is accounted for by the net income group of 1,000–1,500 euros per month – it is also likely that more than 70 percent of the volunteers in Erding district assess their financial situation as rather stable.
- The commitment of young volunteers is weaker in Erding: most survey participants are older than 41, whereas the share of volunteers over 50 years old accounts for 54 percent.
- Most volunteers in Erding district work at least once a week (81 percent), and the 130 respondents perform altogether about 3,000 hours of volunteer work each month, which is strongly concentrated on medical accompaniment (9 percent), assistance on matters related to public authorities (15 percent), learning support (26 percent), and other matters (50 percent).
- On average, a volunteer is active for 24.4 hours a month in the district of Erding, while 55 percent of the refugee helpers work for up to 30 hours per month – largely comparable to the 33 percent

of respondents with 3–5 hours per week and 21.4 percent with as many as 6–10 hours on the national level demonstrated in Karakayali and Kleist (2015). Extrapolated to the 450 helpers in the district of Erding, this results in approximately 10,000 hours per month and 120,000 hours per year in the peak period of 2015–2016. Assuming that a full-time civil servant works approximately 1,615 hours per year,<sup>4</sup> around 82 full-time positions

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<sup>4</sup> See also [www.skverlag.de/fileadmin/images\\_content/...rd.../RDM18\\_Soll-Jahresarbeitszeit.xls](http://www.skverlag.de/fileadmin/images_content/...rd.../RDM18_Soll-Jahresarbeitszeit.xls).

would have to be created for the 120,000 hours worked.

Again, an average volunteer is active for 24.4 hours in a month. Although the income level of a larger share of volunteers is probably well above the minimum wage, the current minimum wage of 8.84 euros per hour is applied for the calculation in consideration of the somewhat less-sophisticated natures of a large share of volunteer activities<sup>5</sup> as well as due in part to reasons of simplicity. Moreover, the volunteers also brought in ‘material’ donations, of which the monthly value is estimated to be 66.2 euros on average. The type of material donation is rather diverse: for example, private cars were used, the volunteers worked with their own PC, printer, telephone, etc. In addition, tickets, stamps, and groceries were also purchased. From the value of the labor performed free of charge and the benefits in kind, the monthly performance of an average volunteer amounts to approximately 281.9 euros (= 215.7 euros + 66.2 euros). However, it should be borne in mind that this sum does not include the social security contribution of 42.9 euros (= 19.9 percent of 215.7 euros). Furthermore, volunteers do not receive continued payment in the case of illness or benefits such as paid vacation. This would increase personnel costs by a further 4 percent for sick leave (= 0.04 x 258.6 euros = 10.3 euros) and 8 percent for paid minimum vacation (= 0.08 x 258.6 euros = 20.7 euros).

In other words, even though the economic value of an average volunteer’s performance is calculated based on the ‘minimum’ compensation rules and their application prescribed in German employment law, a substitute of this average volunteer by a normal employee subject to the German social insurance scheme would cause monthly personnel costs of 290 euros, in addition to the monthly material costs of 66.2 euros. Extrapolated to the total number of 450 voluntary refugee helpers involved in the district of Erding, Table 3 summarizes the possible monthly and annual opportunity costs.

As already shown above, if the calculation is solely based on the amount of working time, the district government of Erding should probably employ an extra 82 people in order to fully substitute these voluntary helpers. Let us additionally assume now that the aforementioned

<sup>5</sup> The skills-based volunteering aspects are not adequately considered in our calculations. For more about this type of volunteering in detail, see Maki and Snyder (2015) and Steimel (2018).

Table 3

**Opportunity Costs of Voluntary Work Performed by 450 Refugee Helpers in the District of Erding**

Opportunity costs	Monthly	Annual
Personnel costs	130,500 euros	1,566,000 euros
Material costs	29,799 euros	357,588 euros
Total	160,299 euros	1,923,588 euros

Source: Authors’ own calculation.

services performed by the individual voluntary refugee helpers can be rendered more efficiently through professional staffing, better organization, and process optimization by the local government, which in turn requires the recruitment of additional personnel to carry out such ‘additional’ public services. Furthermore, the total opportunity costs for such volunteer work (Table 3) are considered in the calculation as a sort of financial restriction.

Table 4 demonstrates an example of the gross salary calculation for the low-pay civil servants (without professional experience) working in German local government in 2017. At present, for a full-time employee in the lowest civil-servant payment grouping, the annual gross labor cost reaches approximately 34,000 euros. In other words, an additional 45 to 55 full-time public jobs are assumed to be required in the district of Erding for the substitution of the volunteers’ contribution and at the same time should be financed in order to match the economic value of their efforts made in the peak period of 2015–2016. This would result in annual personnel costs of 1.6 million euros (without considering the material cost of 360,000 euros) and 1.9 million euros of personnel and material costs together for the lower payment group of local civil servants, respectively. This calculation result is also comparable to the real situation mentioned above: 46 civil-servant posts in the district office of Erding are currently dealing with the asylum tasks and refugee matters, which is estimated to create an additional local expenditure burden of more than 2 million euros annually.

To be sure, one can still question whether the survey results represent the ‘true’ income level and structure of the volunteers in the district of Erding; and all the activities that volunteers perform and their substitute could be assessed as those carried out by the minimum-wage group and the low-wage

Table 4

**Annual Wage of Full-Time, Low-Pay Local Government Employees in 2017**

Gross monthly wage	2,109.19 euros
12 x gross monthly wage	25,310.28 euros
+ Annual special payment	1,730.80 euros (= 82.06% x 2,109.19)
= Gross annual wage	27,041.08 euros
+ Social insurance: employer’s contribution	5,273.01 euros (= 19.5% x 27,041.08))
+ Additional insurance scheme for civil servants	1,744.15 euros (= 6.45% x 27,041.08)
= Total annual labor cost	34,058.24 euros

Source: <http://oeffentlicher-dienst.info/tvoed/vka/>; <http://www.lohn-info.de/sozialversicherungsbeitraege2017.html>.

civil-servant group. Nevertheless, this rather simple but cautious calculation delivers some initial ideas related to the value of volunteers' work, which has significantly contributed to overcoming the German refugee crisis since the 2015–2016 period.

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