# E–MINDFUL
## PROJECT

# / Germany

# CONTEXTUAL
# ANALYSIS

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# Executive summary

In recent years, Germany has embraced its new identity as a country of immigration, as reflected by its policy changes and political landscape. The majority of German society view immigration as something positive, and they are especially welcoming to those fleeing war and conflict. Moreover, the government recognizes the need for migrant workers as a means to address labor shortages amidst the country's aging population. However, there are challenges, including a declining willingness to support refugees, the rise of far-right movements, and misinformation. In addition, many migrants are reportedly leaving the country because they feel unwelcome and unappreciated. Furthermore, migration policy stands out as one of the most polarizing issues in German society. Simply put, the national debate around migration and refugees over the last few years has been caught between a "welcome culture" narrative and a "the boat is full" rhetoric. The driving concepts that influence the narratives surrounding the contributions of migrants to German society are "identity", "security", "demographics", and "economics". These concepts include polarized views on immigration, the role of religion, security concerns, and the intertwined concepts of integration and economics, reflecting the complexity of migration narratives in Germany,

When discussing the prevailing narratives on migration, it is noteworthy that, in Germany, individuals who are not visually part of the white-majority are often labeled as migrants based on their appearance, religion, or surname alone. Moreover, migration policy debates in Germany are often tainted with racism, with negative portrayals of Black people, Romani people, or people perceived as Muslim, Asian or Slavic/Eastern European. The Black Lives Matter movement and the Ukraine war highlighted the unequal treatment of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) refugees in Germany. The guest worker narrative, rooted in Germany's history of labor migration, persists and influences current perceptions of immigrants, often focusing on their economic utility. Anti-Slavic and Anti-Eastern European stereotypes and prejudices continue to shape immigration narratives, perpetuating discrimination against migrants from these regions. Recent anti-Semitic narratives have been associated with conspiracy theories that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, migrant women often remain overlooked and invisible in migration debates, being frequently portrayed as helpless victims rather than empowered individuals with agency. The 2015 New Year's Eve incidents in Cologne highlighted issues of sexualized violence, bringing about the dominant narrative that people perceived as Muslim, in particular "Arab-looking' men, are dangerous criminals and a particular threat to the White, German woman.

In Germany, traditional media, such as newspapers, television, and radio still play a significant role in shaping public opinion, even though social media has gained prominence. The media often acts as a policy actor and shapes public opinion, with a majority of Germans still relying on traditional media for news. Over the years, German media has evolved in its portrayal of immigrants, from reinforcing stereotypes to shifting towards a more positive view of immigration, with a focus on the positive contributions of immigrants to the labor market and the economy.

However, some newspapers still emphasize the risks and dangers associated with immigration, reflecting a polarized media landscape. This is further underlined by the most commonly used frames to discuss migration in the traditional media, "the problem frame" and "the human-interest frame". Social media's role in shaping perceptions of migration is more complex due to highly fluctuating levels of accuracy and factuality of the information that is spread. Indeed, social media can perpetuate hate speech and misinformation. For example, a right-wing ecosystem on Facebook that is linked to posts and comments that could potentially "amplify antagonistic and violent behavior towards migrants" is associated with a rise in hate crimes in Germany. To tackle this issue, among other proposals, in 2017 the German parliament passed a law that imposes fines on social media companies that fail to delete expressions of hate speech and other offensive posts on their platforms.

"The movable middle", the target group of the campaign prototype to raise awareness about the contributions of migrants to society, is identified as the age group 18–25-year-olds. This group oscillates between the "human interest" and the "security/risk" positions, is susceptible to fast-paced media and open to acceptance of others as a moral obligation. As communication via social media is especially popular in this target group, the prototype used should be conceived as content that could be communicated easily through social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, X or TikTok. The campaign aims to be easily adaptable to the specific formats of any of these platforms. It also aims for the campaign to be able to be taken out of the internet and into the real world, for example by use of a QR code. Furthermore, although the target group is 18–25-year-olds, the potential target group could be as large as 7–70-year-old readers. For the campaign, it is further decided to use irony as a means to stir a narrative shift on the issue of migrants in Germany, because irony – being an unusual approach - goes "viral". In other words, its unusualness attracts the audience's attention.

In collaboration with a Syrian comic artist, the new character, 'the Berlin Fox', has been developed. It represents the many foxes that live in the Berlin parks, which are generally liked, but somewhat of a mystery in the urban landscape. This makes the Fox an ideal character for the projection of "otherness". It is a simple, relatable and easy to spread character that has the potential to become more than just a prototype, but instead the center of a series of stories. Furthermore, the character's gender and sexuality are deliberately left open to interpretation, emphasizing diversity and inclusion in the narratives. In response to the finding that many migrants that arrive to Germany, decide to leave again because they are unable to find their place in the country, the Berlin Fox aims to represent less the people arriving, but more so the people trying to find their place. The plan is to release a comic strip with the Berlin Fox as the central character, once a week on social media channels, with a focus on maintaining a sense of irony and engagement with the audience to ensure virality. By Miriam Gaye, Elena Habersky, Gerda Heck, Michael Henrichs, and Sergio Basso

In April 2023, in the small southwest German town of Ostelsheim, something incredible happened. After eight years in Germany, having fled Syria's Civil War and not having known a word of German, Ryyan Alshebl was elected mayor of his small

town of 2,500 people. In an interview with NBC News in the United States, Alshebl, only 29 years old, stated, "German society is ready to break new ground" (Eckardt and Smith, 2023).

Indeed, this report will show that the majority of German society view immigration as something positive, and they are especially welcoming to those fleeing war and conflict, such as Alshebl, who fled the war in Syria eight years ago. Germany now views itself as a country of immigration, both in its policy and in its politics. As such, society and its structures must figure out how to welcome new immigrants, including those who come from non-European countries. At the same time, a recently published study shows that there has been a declining willingness to support refugees, and that one in three is in favor of detaining asylum seekers during the asylum procedure (IPSOS, 2023). The challenge, as will be demonstrated throughout the report, is dealing with the recent rise in neo-Nazi gatherings, right-wing political parties like the AFD, and misinformation from the media, particularly that which is found on the internet.

Germany also has a strong demand for migrant workers. The government recognizes the need for migrant workers to help address labor shortages amidst the country's aging population. On the other hand, statistics show that many migrants are leaving the country as they do not feel welcome nor appreciated. This will be discussed in greater detail in the Introduction.

Finally, while Germany has its own historical prejudices and issues to deal with, the recent changes in the country, both structural and societal, show that the majority of the population is ready for change and will be welcoming to newcomers. Alshebl's recent political success is a positive development. However, as will be explained in this report, the vocal opposition of far-right factions reflects lingering tensions and makes the situation in the country more complicated than optimistic perspectives may suggest.

## Introduction

This section will discuss the legal framework that governs Germany's migration policy, as well as historical and current migration statistics and data.

## Legal Framework

According to observers, the current phase of the German migration and integration policy began in the year 2000 (SVR, 2014). Since then, improvement and changes have been taking place in many areas. For instance, the residency requirement to obtain German citizenship has been reduced from 15 years to 8 years (cf. Bundesministerium Des Innern Und Für Heimat, 2022). In addition, the reform of the citizenship law in 1999/2000 was a decisive event marking a big change in policy. For the first time, elements of birthright citizenship (ius soli) were incorporated into German nationality law. This major change is a result of Germany's need for skilled workers due to the aging population (cf. Wunsch/Buchmann, 2019).

With the immigration law passed in July 2004 by the Bundestag and the Bundesrat, decades of discussions around migration and immigration policy have finally come to an end, and it was officially established that Germany is a country of immigration (cf. Bildung, 2007). A more recent milestone that marked an additional turning point in migration policy was the decision taken by former Chancellor Angela Merkel in September 2015 to accept thousands of asylum seekers from Syria. Even if this decision did not lead to a net increase in overall immigration numbers, the change represented an opening of German migration policy (cf. Tjaden/Heidland, 2021).

Many of the changes in such policies, which have been implemented since the year 2000, have been a direct result of pressure by the labor industry trying to address the shortage of skilled workers (cf. Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz, n.d.). Many companies, especially those in the fields of healthcare, skilled crafts, academia and vocational training, including in the areas of medicine, automotive, mechanical, and electrical engineering, IT, and software development (cf. BMWK, 2023a), are already acutely suffering from the shortage. More than half of these companies see this as the gravest threat to their business development. In 2010, 16% of companies classified skilled worker shortage as a business risk (ibid.). This aspect will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Two, in which the narratives and models of German migration policy are introduced.

The recognition of foreign professional qualifications has also undergone major changes. In 2012, after initial reforms, only a few workers succeeded, with great difficulty, in having their non-European professional qualification recognized (cf. Sommer, 2015 :154). Since the Skilled Workers Immigration Act took effect on March 1, 2020, further steps have been taken to enable the recognition procedures of professional qualifications as a general requirement for the immigration of skilled

workers from third countries. This particularly applies to qualified specialists and those who want to work in regulated professions, such as doctors or teachers. And this potentially enhances transparency and ensures quality - both for employers and for skilled workers (cf. Anerkennung ausländischer Berufsqualifikationen, 2022).

During the year 2022, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) decided that Ukrainian students who have fled Ukraine (while carrying the Ukrainian citizenship) can study in Germany without a high school degree (Bayat, 2022). This caused a lot of irritation among other migrants who have been living in Germany for years (Sammann, 2022) and whose professional qualifications were never recognized (cf. Liebau/Salikutluk, 2015).

The current governing coalition, which includes Social Democrats, the Green Party, and Liberals, adopted several new migration packages. The first migration package was approved by the German cabinet on July 6, 2022. It eased the residency requirements for migrants, facilitated immigration of skilled workers, granted better access to integration courses, and implemented more consistent policies of expulsion for those who have been convicted of a crime. The second migration package from 2022, with the working title, "Family and Labor Market Integration Act," is intended to implement further migration mandates included in the coalition agreement. These include topics such as easier family reunification and access to the labor market for asylum seekers and tolerated persons who cannot be deported for humanitarian reasons (cf. Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2022; BGB, Urteil vom 06.07.2022). The package also simplifies immigration of skilled workers with employment contracts. For those skilled workers without an employment contract, entry will be according to a point system.  This system introduces a so-called "opportunity card," in which points are awarded for qualifications like integration in Germany, professional experience, language skills and age (cf. Eckpunkte: Fachkräfteeinwanderung aus Drittstaaten | Bundesregierung, 2022). The Skilled Worker Immigration Act, which was passed in March 2023, includes the opportunity for skilled workers to pursue any qualified employment without prior recognition of qualifications and without a German employment contract (Heimat, 2023).

## Data

Until the late 19th century, Germany was primarily known as a country of emigration, although it has historically and continuously experienced both immigration and emigration flows to and from its borders (Hanewinkel and Oltmer, 2018). While recent flows of migration, mostly of people fleeing conflicts abroad, namely Syria in 2015 and Ukraine in 2022, have made it seem that there is a large net migration in Germany, migration data tells a different story of who is coming, who is going, and who is staying.

Migration to and from Germany includes those who are fleeing persecution or conflict, and applying for asylum and resettlement in the country. It also includes those moving to and from the country as labor migrants and members of families. Before the reunification of Germany in 1989, the number of asylum applications from Eastern, Central Eastern and Southern Europe was increasing. It exceeded 100,000 in 1988, climbed to approximately 120,000 in 1989, reached 190,000 in unified Germany in 1990, and finally surpassed 440,000 by 1992 during the time of the conflict with former Yugoslavia (Hanewinkel and Oltmer, 2018). Overall, migration in 1992 included more than 1.5 million people immigrating while 720,000 left the country, resulting in a net migration of 782,000 (Hanewinkel and Oltmer, 2018). However, such numbers of net migration began to decrease after peaking in 1992. In 2008 and 2009, Germany was a country of emigration rather than immigration with the number of people leaving surpassing that of those entering. The number of positive net migration began to once again slightly increase from 2009-2014, before the recent large net migration in 2015 (Hanewinkel and Oltmer, 2018).

The highest number of asylum applications in Germany's history occurred in 2015, with 442,000 first time applications, accounting for almost ⅓ of all asylum applications in Europe that year (Connor, 2016). However, out of the 2.14 million immigrants who entered the country in 2015, the vast majority mainly originated from other European countries (around 40%), namely from Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria (Hanewinkel and Oltmer, 2018). Even with the high number of immigrants in 2015, there was still only a net migration of 1.14 million people, as almost 1 million people left the country during the same year (Hanewinkel and Oltmer, 2018).

After the peak of 2015, the number of net migrants to Germany began once again to decrease. For example, in 2018, Germany received 631,000 new immigrants on a long-term (more than one year) basis, or on a permanent basis (including changes of status and free mobility), which was down 26.7% in comparison to 2017 (BAMF, 2020). In 2019, EU nationals represented 51.1% of all immigrants to Germany, with an additional 15.3% coming from European countries outside the EU (BAMF, 2020). In 2019, Germany recorded approximately 1.6 million immigrants and 1.2 million emigrants total. Therefore, immigration to Germany decreased 1.7% from 2018 while emigration increased 3.9%. The result was a net immigration of 327,060 people, somewhat smaller than in 2018 which saw a net migration of 399,680 people (BAMF, 2020).

In 2021, there were 22.3 million people with a migrant background living in Germany, of which 11.8 million foreign residents. During that year, 131,600 people were naturalized. In addition, 1.3 million people arrived in Germany, and 1 million left, resulting in a net migration of 329,163 individuals, much lower than the 1.4 million peak in 2015 (Statistische Bundesamt, 2022). These numbers show that though there has been a positive net migration to Germany, the numbers have decreased and remain relatively low considering the country's 84 million population (Statistische Bundesamt, 2022). And in 2021, the same trends continue, where the largest

number of immigrants originated from Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria, accounting for about 952,000 people (Statistische Bundesamt, 2022). Even though the overall net migration is not very large, the World Migration Report 2021 demonstrates that Germany is still the most popular migrant destination in Europe (IOM, 2022). From February to August 2022, the number of displaced persons from Ukraine fleeing the conflict matched the 952,000 Romanian, Polish, and Bulgarian migrants in all of 2021 (Statistische Bundesamt, 2022). Most displaced persons from Ukraine entered the country in the first months of the conflict in March (431,000) and April (198,000). While there are no exact numbers of Ukrainians who may have returned home afterwards; a poll of 11,225 refugees jointly carried out in December 2022 by several bodies, including the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, suggested that 34% planned to stay until the end of the war, while 27% were undecided, and some 2% planned to leave within a year (Williams, 2022).

# /Chapter One

This chapter examines narratives about migrants' contribution to the German host society. The polarization of migration narratives in the German context will be discussed, including those offered in  academic literature. This chapter will focus on the following driving concepts around identification: Identity, Security, Demographics, and Economics. Migration policy, along with social policy and climate policy, is one of the most polarizing issues in German society, according to a study by the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (FES) (cf.Faus & Storks, 2019). The national debate around migration and refugees over the last few years has been caught between a "welcome culture" narrative and the "boat is full" rhetoric (Frese & Paulus, 2020: 3).

## Identity

According to a recent study, a majority of Germans (53%) have a positive attitude towards immigration (cf. Faus & Storks, 2019). Only 15% of Germans completely reject the idea of outside immigration. Of those surveyed, 78% believe foreigners who are required to leave the country (because their application to stay or extend their stay was rejected by the immigration authority) should be allowed to stay. This same 78% also believes that those who are well integrated into the country and have a job or apprenticeship should be allowed to stay in the country and have their status legalized, if it is not already. In addition, there is an overall general acceptance towards refugees, with special sympathy for the causes of flight. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed said that, in the future, Germany should at least take in

people who have fled conflict or civil war. People who are persecuted in their home countries because of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or sexual orientation should take priority. Sixty-seven percent of respondents also believe that Germany should continue to take in the same numbers of asylum seekers it currently takes, if not more. When it comes to people fleeing for economic reasons or escaping poverty, respondents were less willing to accept them into society, with 57 percent saying that Germany should take in fewer so-called "economic migrants" (cf.Faus & Storks, 2019).

## Security

Security concerns have frequently been used as a rationale by some groups to justify hostility toward refugees and migrants. Generally, migration to Germany is often associated with Islam. The adherents of Islam, as well as people perceived to be Muslim based on visible identifiers, are often seen as incompatible with German society and would not be able to integrate (cf. Irrgang, 2011: 24). This is particularly tied to the guest worker movement because many people from Islamic-majority countries, such as Turkey and Morocco, came to Germany to work (cf. Bade, 2001). In addition, refugees from certain countries, like Syria, Afghanistan, and those from North Africa, are perceived as being Muslim even though many religious minorities exist in these countries (cf. Ezli, 2022: 533). A fear of the "Islamization of the German Occident" is oftentimes stirred up by right-wing politicians and groups when it is politically viable for them (cf. Bildung, 2021). The perceived influence Islam has on German society frightens 64 percent of respondents in the FES study (cf.Faus & Storks, 2019). This sentiment has been confirmed in societal debates, such as the one following the Cologne 2015 New Years Eve[1] attacks, which targeted women in public spaces (cf. Braun & Dinkelaker, 2021). Another debate is concerned with banning Muslim women from wearing the headscarf while serving in public office (cf. Lehning, 2022).

One materialization of this political shift to the right can be seen in the association known as the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident (Pegida), an organization that was founded in 2014. Pegida claims to take a stand against an alleged over-foreignization of the country. They advocate openly against the current immigration and asylum policies of the Federal Republic. From its founding until today, the group has become significantly more radical. For example, at a demonstration in 2018 in Chemnitz, there were racist riots in which non-white people were threatened, chased and beaten (cf. Nimz, 2021). Since 2014, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz) registered more members of the movement as far-right extremists (cf. Nimz, 2021). In several German states, Pegida offshoots have been monitored since 2015 by the Office for the Protection of

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1 During the New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015, there was allegedly an increase in sexual violence and assaults in Cologne at the town square. This triggered fierce racist media and political discourse in Germany in which especially Islamic refugee men were portrayed as a danger to white German women.

the Constitution (cf. Bildung, 2021). In addition, the right-wing party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), founded in 2013, has succeeded in helping influence the discourse on the so-called "migration crisis" of 2015/2016. More and more voices joined together to echo the discourse of right-wing populists who were particularly vocal against the reception of asylum seekers (cf. Bildung, 2022a).

Yet, a study of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) found that a majority of respondents, 86 percent, fear an increase in right-wing extremism and racist violence in the country; 81 percent fear an increasing division within the society; and 73% fear a future with increased crime and a higher number of terrorist attacks (cf. Faus & Storks, 2019). This could be because recently there has been an increase in racially motivated terrorist attacks in Germany (cf. Speit, 2021). These include the NSU attacks: from 2000 to 2007, ten racialized people, nine with a Turkish background and one with a Greek background, were murdered by the terrorist group "National Socialist Underground." The murderers were identified only in 2011 due to the failure of the German security authorities (cf. Bildung, 2022c). Another right-wing extremist attack happened on October 9th, 2019, a high Jewish holiday, in Halle. This attack targeted a synagogue and attempted a mass murder of the Jewish people inside. The attacker could not enter the synagogue due to strict security. However, he shot at a passerby and then targeted a kebab store. He killed 40-year-old Jana Lange, who lived near the synagogue and was on her way home, and 20-year-old Kevin Schwarze, who had been working at a nearby construction site and was spending his lunch break near the kebab store. The attacker also fired on at least three people passing by the snack bar and chased two people by foot, but the five were able to flee unharmed (cf. Von Sachsen-Anhalt, 2022). The most recent racially motivated right-wing extremist attack happened on February 19th 2020 in Hanau, where eight people with migrant(-read) backgrounds and one who is part of the Sinti and Roma minority were murdered (cf. Gedenken an Opfer von Hanau | Bundesregierung, 2023). Six other people were injured during the attack (cf. Bildung, 2023). After the crime, the perpetrator shot his mother and then himself. Before the attack took place, the perpetrator, Tobias R., posted statements and videos with racist and antisemitic views on the internet (cf. Bildung, 2023). According to an expert opinion commissioned by the Federal Prosecutor's Office, the 43-year-old is also alleged to have suffered from paranoid schizophrenia (cf. Bildung, 2023).

At the same time, a study from the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation shows that trust and sense of security are low among the majority of the German population, especially toward Muslim immigrants (cf. Roose, 2021). There is a fear that the immigration of people from Muslim-majority countries will result in admitting terrorists, a narrative that commonly targets Muslim men (cf. Beitzer, 2015). Similarly, there is a fear that refugees and migrants are more threatened by right-wing extremism in Germany, which highlights a security problem within the country (cf. Roose, 2021).

## Demography and discourses explained by the concept of integration

In Germany, migration and integration policies are strongly thought of as intertwined (cf. Ezil, 2021: 12). The current political interpretation of migration policy has been criticized using anti-racist, migratory and post-migrant [2] discourses. The questions that arise on the concept of integration deals with who should be integrated, how and by whom, in addition to who defines integration, for whom are they defining it, and what does it actually mean? (cf. Scheller, 2014: 23f).

Generally, the concept of integration describes the opportunities for participation in central areas of society, such as the labor market, education and training systems, and the housing market. These all supposedly allow "integration" to be measured. In modern societies, every individual must, in principle, achieve integration (Oltmer, 2022). The concept of integration in immigration debates is usually concerned with immigrants and their descendants who are visible to the majority society (cf. Oltmer, 2022) through their skin color, dress, or other features that distinguish them from the majority society. In this context, integration is seen in political and media discourses as the duty of immigrants or/and non-white people.

[3]The definition of a person with a migration background is generally not a legal one; it is usually derived from the fact that the person themselves, or at least one of their birth parents, did not, at some point, have German citizenship (cf. Petschel & Will, 2020: 87). Critics of the concept argue that integration is interpreted as a one-sided process where migrants and their descendants integrate into the majority society (cf. Dominique, 2022). This raises the question of assimilation and othering, which are defined as follows. "Othering" describes the distancing and differentiation from other groups in order to confirm one's own 'normality'. "Assimilation" means to adapt, which explains that certain characteristics lead to some individuals having to adapt more than others (cf. Dominique, 2022). The question here is, who is considered to be in need of integration and who is considered to be the one representing the society one should integrate into? Those who are unable to integrate are often seen as failures, and there is little introspection on behalf of the host society and its failings (cf. Dominique, 2022).

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2 Post-migrant describes the fact that structures, institutions and political cultures are being adapted to the recognized reality of migration. This goes hand in hand with a recognition of Germany as a country of immigration. The aim is supposed to result in more permeability and social advancement, but it also provokes defensive responses and conflicts (cf. Foroutan 2021).

3 The definition in Germany of who has a migration background and who does not is generally defined by the fact that the person themselves or at least one parent of birth does not have German citizenship (cf. Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland 2021). However, in general society, people are often only asked about an immigrant background if the people in question are non-white. For example, if a person has a white Austrian or Danish background, this is often not described as a migration background, but if a person has a non-western appearance, it is often assumed that they have a migration background, even if this is not the case (cf. Bildung 2022b).

Immigrants in Germany feel that they must integrate into German society. This is especially true for those people who are perceived as non-white and non-German, regardless of whether they have been living in the country for generations. At the end of the day, the integration project does not hold the German society accountable for its flaws.

## Economics

As mentioned briefly in the first section of this report, the German economy is in favor of migration because of the need for migrants' contribution to the labor market and economy. To facilitate this need, new legislation has focused on supplying the German labor force, particularly due to the shortage of skilled workers. The legislation attempts to recruit people who want to come and work. This is clear on the website of the German government "Make it in Germany" (cf. 10 Jahre Make it in Germany: 2023) and the discourse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who repeats the slogan, "together to secure the future" (Rede von Olaf Scholz. "Vereint Zukunft sichern": n.d.) and emphasizes the importance of foreign skilled workers for Germany and its economy.

Germany communicates to the outside world that skilled workers are needed in Germany. People should be recruited to stay and those already in Germany, should be able to remain without difficulties. Parallel to this, those whose degrees were never recognized must work in more informal, manual work, like domestic or construction work. (cf. Mill et al., 2013: 7).  For those affected, this means that they could never work with their degree(s), and would rather have to work in cleaning companies, factories, delivery services, and other precarious industries. While some 30% of Germans fear competition in the labor market (FES study), it must be noted that workers are needed to fill vacancies due to the aging population, as well as jobs that many Germans would prefer not to take.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the polarization of migration narratives in the German context, particularly in relation to the driving concepts of identity, security, demographics, discourses, and economics. While a majority of Germans express a positive attitude toward immigration and refugees, particularly those well integrated and those fleeing conflict or persecution, there is also a significant fear of Islam and concerns about the impact of immigration on security.  This is evidenced by the rise of right-wing groups like Pegida and Alternative for Germany (AFD). However, there is also a growing fear of right-wing extremism, racist violence, and increasing polarization. Recent racially motivated terrorist attacks in Germany have further highlighted these concerns. Overall, the issue of migration and refugee policy remains a contentious and divisive topic in German society, and multiple perspectives and narratives continue to shape the overall discourse.

# /Chapter Two

This chapter discusses German migration policy narratives. As briefly discussed in the Data section, Germany has only embraced the identity of a "country of immigration" or "immigration society" over the past 20 years. (cf. Alexopoulou, 2020: 7). Before that, immigration to Germany was not seen as something desirable (ibid).

## Who is a migrant in the first place?

In Germany, people who are not seen as part of the white-majority are viewed as migrants. This judgment is less concerned with the migration backgrounds of people concerned or their parents. It rather focuses on whether they look "different," have a "different" religion, or have a "different" surname (cf. El-Mafaalani, 2017: 470). This is also observed in the current debate around the fireworks ban. On New Year's Eve 2022/23, there were attacks in major German cities in which young people threw fireworks at police officers and journalists. It was claimed that many of the perpetrators were migrants, but it later confirmed that most of the perpetrators were, in fact, German. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said that there is a, "big problem with certain young men with a migrant background" (cf. Der Spiegel, 2023). In the Parliament debate on the 18th of January 2023, Andrea Lindholz of the Bavarian Christian Social Union party (CSU) said that it should not be ignored that some of the perpetrators were not German citizens (cf. Tagesschau, 2023). CDU chairman Friedrich Merz expressed racist and Islamophobic sentiments when, on January 13th 2023, he said that some students with an immigrant background behaved like "little pashas" and were supported in this behavior by their fathers (cf. Tagesschau, 2023). Frank Balzer, the CDU expert on interior affairs expressed xenophobic ideals when he asked the question "What are the first names of the suspects with German nationality?" (cf. Van Der Kraats Dpa, 2023). In this debate, it becomes clear how "othering" that is based on one's background is intertwined with racist stereotypes (cf. Kiesel, 2023).

## Migration Narratives and Racism

The narratives that prevail in the migration policy debates are often contaminated with racism. This is shown through a study done by the National Discrimination and Racism Monitor (NaDiRA) (cf. NaDiRa Kurzstudie | Rassismus in Politik und Medien, n.d.). People perceived as Muslim are usually portrayed negatively, as previously mentioned (Ibid.). This is evident in the aforementioned debate surrounding the 2015/16 New Year's Eve in Cologne, where the narrative that Muslim-read men are criminals and dangerous became the dominant narrative. The subsequent narrative about sexualized violence identified refugee men, or "North African" and "Arab-looking" men as a particular threat to the white, German woman (cf. Yurdakul et al., 2018 :65).

The worldwide Black Lives Matter movement, which was triggered by the murder of a Black man, George Floyd, in the United States in 2020, brought the debate surrounding racism in Germany to the center stage (cf. Tietze, 2020: 3). For the first time, institutional and structural racism, police violence in Germany and several other European countries were publicly discussed across various forums (cf. Zajak et al., 2021). There were calls to investigate racial profiling by the police (cf. Teevs, 2020). There were also talks discussing the removal and deletion of the term "race" in the German constitution.

People perceived as Asian face contradictory stereotyping in Germany, including both negative racism and positive views portraying them as ideal immigrants (cf. Nguyen et al., 2021). In the latter, they are often labeled as the "model migrants," and contrasted to other (post-)migrant groups such as Black people and people perceived as Muslim. On the other hand, they are portrayed as a homogeneous and threatening mass (cf. Nguyen et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a global increase in anti-Asian racism, including in Germany, where Asians have reported experiencing discrimination and hate speech that is associated with the pandemic (cf. Scholaske, 2022). People of East and Southeast Asian descent have been targeted with racist attacks, including verbal, physical, and frequent spitting (ibid). These incidents have often been fueled by misinformation and stereotypes about an alleged connection between Asians and the pandemic which is peddled by certain groups and politicians.

Narratives about Black people are colonial continuities, and often associate being Black with being "poor", "violent", and "dirty". They also revolve around ideas that Black people are of low character who are dangerous, aggressive and irrational ( cf. Yurdakul et al., 2017:65). Black refugees are most often seen as economic migrants, even though, mostly, this is not the case. A 2018 study shows that between 2009 and 2018, most immigrants from Africa came to Germany for purposes of family reunification (cf. Leubecher, 2020). In fact, immigrants from West, East and Central Africa are highly qualified (here defined as people with a high school diploma) (cf. Schock et al., 2008).

In Germany, stories surrounding Sinti and Romani people have long been steeped in Antiziganism. Narratives about them as "criminals," "dirty" and "nomads" are passed on and spread from generation to generation. Images of "invasions" by Sinti and Romani people are propagated, even if this is not the case, and the blame is placed upon the immigration of Bulgarians and Romanians, usually for the purpose of work, to Germany. Such debates are held regularly in political circles. In particular, fear of crime, begging, filth, prostitution, abuse of welfare benefits, and poverty are among the classic Anti-ziganist antagonistic tropes that are reproduced in such debates by newspapers, media outlets, and politicians (cf. End, 2014: 20ff).

The unequal treatment of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPoC) refugees fleeing the Ukraine war versus the treatment of White Ukrainian nationals highlighted the racism BIPoC migrants suffer in Germany. During the early months of the conflict,

in which displaced persons from Ukraine were making their way to Germany for safety, the differences in treatment became evident. Until December 2022, 1,036,135 displaced persons from Ukraine have been registered in Germany (according to the Federal Ministry of the Interior). Of those registered, around 96% are Ukrainian citizens. The other 4% consists of 109 different nationalities, with Russia in particular accounting for a large share (cf. Inneres und Heimat, 2022). This was the first time that the Temporary Protection Directive was activated at the European level. Under this Directive, it is possible for displaced persons from Ukraine to receive protection in any EU country without going through a time-consuming asylum procedure. In Germany, however, this benefits only people with Ukrainian citizenship and people who have lived as recognized refugees in Ukraine. Third-country nationals who entered Germany because they were studying or working in Ukraine are currently obliged to leave Germany (Richtlinie, 2001/55/Eg des Rates). While no structural changes have been made to this Directive, immense pressure from NGOs has managed until now to prevent the deportation of the latter group.

Unfortunately, there have been many reports of racist violence against Black people and people of color fleeing Ukraine. In the beginning of their journey, some were prevented from fleeing or were subjected to physical and psychological violence by Ukrainian border control forces. Because of this, alliances have formed in Germany, and Black and PoC-run organizations cooperated on bringing displaced persons from Ukraine to Germany and care for them. Even though the racist incidents are well-known and documented, there has been no government funding to support third-country nationals fleeing the conflict. On the contrary, the discrimination against Black and people of color from Ukraine has been institutionalized (cf. Meyer & Sharma, 2022).

Even though displaced persons from Ukraine with Ukrainian citizenship can study in Germany without a high school diploma, third-country nationals who have already studied in Ukraine cannot continue their studies. There are currently people in custody who have fled Ukraine and are pending deportation who already have a degree from Ukraine, but their degree is not recognized in Germany (cf. PRO ASYL, 2022).

The Bavarian Integration Commissioner, Gudrun Brendel-Fischer, said that, "Ukrainian refugees don't need to be told how a washing machine works, or that cooking is not allowed on the floor of the room. They should therefore be given access to language courses as quickly as possible." Such statements show the outright discrimination privileging white European Ukrainians against "other" migrants (cf. Admin, 2022). The clear racial discourse of German politics towards non-white and non-European migrants is made all the more evident.

## Guest Worker Narratives

The first phase of German migration, or the "foreigner policy," began in 1955 when millions of workers were recruited to former West Germany. People migrated from Italy, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Yugoslavia (cf. Bade, 2001).

The "recruitment phase" of this policy ended during the "oil shock," which witnessed, in 1973, a major economic recession with the "recruitment stop." About 14 million foreigners had entered the Federal territory between 1955-1973. Eleven million (approx. 80%) of them returned to their home countries (cf. Bade, 2001).

This form of labor migration is part of a central narrative for many German people who stayed in the country after the visa restrictions of the 1970s. In Germany, the term "guest labor" implies the aspect of being a guest and having to go back to your country of origin, while evaluating immigrants exclusively in terms of their economic utility for Germany (cf. Ezil, 2021: 115). This is also related to the view that guest workers were predominantly male, since masculinity is associated with hard manual labor which ultimately generates more profit (cf. Westphal, 2007: 129).

This narrative is also linked to current debates about the shortage of skilled workers and migration, whereby economic profit is the focus of migration policy, instead of other skills or talents they bring to the country (cf. Oltmer, 2012: 212).

## Anti-Slavic and Anti-Eastern European Migration Narratives

Slavophobia or anti-Slavism is a form of racism that is embedded in immigration narratives. It is directed towards all Slavs or against individual Slavic peoples when they are perceived as being part of the supposed inferior Slavic race (Petersen, 2022). Many Slavic people were targeted by, and were victims of, the Nazi's during the era of National Socialism (1933-1945). They were classified as less worthy than the superior "Aryan Race." Currently, the category of Slavic peoples is no longer perceived as a separate race in German society. However, anti-Slavic stereotypes continued to prevail since the end of World War II. Some of these prejudices and stereotypes associate Slavic people with alcoholism, criminality and, most especially, cheap labor which can be exploited for profit. These prejudices also affect migrants from Albania, Lithuania, Romania, and Hungary, who - though not technically Slavic - fall under a long history of Anti-"Eastern" European racism in Western Europe (Petersen, 2022; Vlahek, 2022: 32).

## Anti-Semitism

Conspiracy theories in the wake of the Corona pandemic went hand in hand with anti-Semitic narratives (cf. Hagen/Neuburger, 2020: 19). Although Germany has a long history of anti-Semitism and debates surrounding the issue, it is often claimed that recent anti-Semitic phenomena have been brought to Germany with the growing migrant Muslim population (cf. Hagen & Neuburger, 2020: 12). However, saying that anti-Semitism is now only a problem amongst the Muslim community

shifts the blame to the "other." Anti-Semitism is still rooted in German society as a whole. This also includes (post-)migrants to Germany. Antisemitic crimes recorded by the police in Germany have recently increased. Figures from the Federal Ministry of the Interior show that one cannot blame one group of people. At least 1,799 crimes were registered in 2018; the year 2019 recorded 2,032; in 2020, there were 2,351 crimes; and in 2021, 3,027 crimes were recorded. This shows a significant increase of Antisemitism in Germany, which is attributed to, among other things, the Corona pandemic (cf. Brandt, 2022).

## A note on gender

Of the 1.6 million immigrants who arrived in Germany in 2019, around 39 percent were women (cf. Migrationsbericht, 2019). Despite the fact that the number of female immigrants have been increasing since 2015 (ibid.), refugee women are often forgotten and made invisible in debates around migration. This is because the prevailing narrative labels those who fled conflict and war as racialized Black and Arab men. The events of the New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015 triggered multiple debates about sexualized violence against women in major cities in Germany. The dominant debate focused on the protection of white German women with European passports from foreign refugee and migrant men. Refugee women often appear in these discourses only as victims who are repressed victims, helpless and void of agency, and have escaped a harassment nightmare in their countries of origin. These notions are based on the Western discourse of white feminists, portraying women from the global South as non-emancipated and unable to act or speak for themselves (cf. Braun & Dinkelaker, 2021: 68). Indeed, with far-right politicians "co-opting feminist demands for women's emancipation and their right to self-defense, these conservative forces instrumentalize the Cologne sexual assaults for their xenophobic ends" (Abdelmonem et. al., 2016). Opening spaces for these women to speak for themselves permits the challenging of the prevailing narrative.

## Conclusion

Germany has only recently been perceived as a country of immigration, even though migration to Germany recurred for decades. The idea that Germany is a migration country has long been rejected by German politics. But this is changing. It is not surprising that German migration policy narratives are complex and often intertwined with different forms of racism and antisemitism. The historical guest worker narrative, which views immigrants as temporary guests whose worth is solely measured based on the economic profit they generate, continues to influence perceptions of immigrants in Germany. There is a concern that this narrative will replicate due to the shortage of skilled workers as the population ages. Furthermore, narratives about Black people, or people perceived as Muslim or Asian, are often shaped by racism, portraying them as "threats", "criminals", and an "economic burden who contribute nothing meaningful to the country". Especially due to the Corona

pandemic, anti-Semitic and anti-Asian racial stereotypes were fueled. The recent debates about racism in Germany, triggered by the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement and the Ukraine war, highlight the unequal treatment of BIPoC refugees and migrants and the perpetuation of anti-ziganism. There is a need for continued awareness, advocacy, and policy changes that address and challenge the racism and the harmful narratives strongly present in German migration policy. Moreover, these issues create barriers to attracting migration to Germany, which Germany so desperately needs as the demographics of the country change.

# /Chapter Three

This chapter discusses the role of media, in all forms, in influencing the perceptions of politicians and the general public on the topic of migration. The chapter looks at how the media plays the role of policy actor, thereby shaping public opinion. In addition, this chapter reviews how researchers analyze German media on migration, including both traditional and social media.

## Media and Germany

Media has influenced and will continue to influence people's perceptions on numerous topics, especially those that are considered sensitive, such as immigration. While generations past may have relied predominantly on radio, television, and newspapers, the advent of social media has turned many eyes and ears to the internet, via computers and smartphones. This is not to say that the traditional media ceased to exist. Rather, they are directly competing with other in the field of news distribution, while they try to evolve and maintain, even grow, their viewership.

According to Schlager (2007), the media often acts as a policy actor and influences policies by shaping public opinion (Ayoub, 2019). Maysa Ayoub, in her study of the impact of media on migration in Germany (2019), analyzes media considered traditional, like television, radio, magazines, and newspapers, as well as newer media platforms, which are considered social media, such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and TikTok. While younger generations tend to consume their content via social media platforms, the majority of Germans still receive their news from the television, which continues to be the most popular source for news across Western Europe (Ayoub, 2019; Matsa, 2018). Overall, in Germany, most adults continue to get their news from traditional media outlets (Pew Research Center, 2018). In the meantime, television often continues to rely on newspapers for news stories. As found by Cushion et. al (2018), newspapers inform TV broadcast news as TV usually rely on reviewing daily papers and on journalists' interpretation of the news.

# How German Media Discusses Migration: *Evolution*

While many current studies on media and migration in Germany focus on the recent evolution since the 2015 peak, it is important to understand the evolution of German media in general after World War II and gain a better understanding of the bigger picture.

According to a study by Zambonini (2009), since the 1950s and 1960s when the first guest workers came to Germany, German media repeatedly helped reinforce the image of immigrants as "foreigners" and "aliens," sometimes in exaggerated terms. By focusing primarily on the problems associated with migration and leaving out the positive or even mundane aspects of immigrants' lives in Germany, the media helped contribute to an atmosphere of polarization among the German public. The message the media sent during these decades is one that portrays immigrants as tolerated guests, who are welcome so long as they contribute to the country's economic development, even if this positive contribution was itself often overlooked in media coverage (Zambonini, 2009). By the 1990s and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the media's portrayal of "the immigrant" shifted once again, focusing largely on the "illegitimate refugee." This ties into the saying "Das Boot ist Voll" (the boat is full), an oft-heard slogan echoed in the public discussion of the time, and bannered across the cover of the renowned news magazine Der Spiegel (Zambonini, 2009).
Politically, in the year 2000, Germany's migration strategy shifted to reflect the long-overlooked need for integration policies. With this change, media coverage transitioned away from portraying immigrants as "foreigners" to using more positive language. However, after the 9/11 attacks that implicated links to Germany (several of the hijackers had lived in Hamburg), the media's discussion of immigration largely focused on Islam, the religion "brought" by immigrants, and put it in a negative light. (Zambonini, 2009). In 2009, though, Zambonini remained optimistic that the media would evolve in a more positive view of immigration due to three main changes: first, a broad political consensus that Germany needed a modern integration policy; second, politicians at the highest levels were promoting a dialogue with immigrant communities; and third, the media began to cater to immigrant audiences (Zambonini, 2009).

Zambonini had a right to be optimistic. In a 2022 report, researchers found that German news coverage of migration has grown more positive in recent years (Mediendienst, 2022). The study found that, in 2021, newspapers and TV stations emphasized the positive sides of immigration, compared to 2019. In the study, Thomas Hestermann, of Macromedia University of Applied Sciences, examined eight television stations with the widest coverage, as well as the national daily newspapers with the highest circulation. However, this positive sentiment was not universal across all newspapers. The populist Bild tabloid, as well as the civic conservative leaning broadsheet, Die Welt, both published by the Axel Springer group, reported more often on migration in ways that emphasized the risks and dangers brought by immigrants. The more left-liberal FAZ and the Süddeutsche Zeitung, on the other

hand, tended to emphasize the opportunities brought by migration. And the left-leaning Berlin daily, Die Tageszeitung, overwhelmingly presented migration in a positive light (Mediendienst, 2022). According to the report, where coverage was positive, stories often focused on the positive effect of immigrants in the labor market and their contribution to the economy. Elderly care, for instance, which is heavily reliant on workers from Central and Eastern Europe, was highlighted, and the contribution of foreign workers received positive coverage. Stories about migrant entrepreneurship also tended to paint migrants in a good light, particularly when such entrepreneurship was seen as an indicator of successful integration and contribution to the labor market. Sports, in particular, emerged as a strong vehicle for positive stories about migration (Mediendienst, 2022). However, crime reporting included negative portrayal of migrants. The study found that asylum seekers and other migrants were much more likely to have their foreign background emphasized in media reports when they perpetrated crimes, as opposed to when they were victims of crimes (Mediendienst, 2022). A final trend that the study noted was that, in contrast to 2019, news reporting on migration and asylum tended to feature the voices of migrants and refugees more prominently. Their representation doubled in two years. Around a quarter of contributions made in news reports in 2021 came from migrants themselves (Mediendienst, 2022).

## How German Media Discusses Migration:

### *Traditional Media*

As more Germans continue to receive their news from traditional forms of media, this section will begin with Maysa Ayoub's (2019) analysis of different German newspapers.

Ayoub looked at 129 articles from the daily edition of the Die Welt newspaper and placed them into different "frames" to see how they discussed migration. Her findings showed that most articles (94/129) framed their messages using commonly used generic frames, as well as culturally and politically driven frames. "The problem frame" and "the human-impact frame" were the two most used, followed by "the economic consequences frame." The remaining 35 articles used an issue specific frame, such as "the migration-asylum nexus frame" that framed the issue based on distinguishing between economic migrants and those fleeing war or conflict (Ayoub, 2019).

All in all, 32 of the articles that used the problem frame defined the refugee issue as "a problem" with clear cause and effect. Out of the 32 articles, 14 problematized the influx of refugees and the way Germany dealt with them, 10 problematized the process of providing shelter to the incoming refugees, and the remaining 8 articles dealt with the rise of right-wing extremism, the refugee protest movement in 2013, and refugee integration. Those placed under "the human-interest frame," primarily discussed refugee shelter, irregular migration, minors, church asylum, and Merkel's

2015 "open-door" policy. Thirteen articles used "the Economic Consequences Frame," where some focused on the possible economic contribution of refugees; but the majority highlighted the cost of hosting immigrants and blamed migrants' unemployment on lack of integration into German society (Ayoub, 2019).

Apart from the forty articles using "the human-interest frame," the majority of the articles (90 out of 129) negatively constructed the target population. For example, 32 articles problematized the open-door policy and the process of hosting refugees and blamed the latter policy for the rise of right-wing extremism.

In an international comparative study, the liberal Süddeutsche Zeitung, and the center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, were analyzed for Germany (Maniou & Moutselos, 2023). The authors found that Germany uses more partisan sources in their editorials, and that editorials are written by individuals, like politicians or activists, rather than historical groups, like trade unions (ibid). They also find that the Süddeutsche Zeitung is very critical of nationalism, whether expressed by citizens or by social movements, and that its editorials were very vocal against right-wing social movements and their 2016 hostility towards the "welcome culture" (ibid). While still a polarizing issue, the study found that, overall, polarization around the issue of migration was lower in Germany, especially when compared to other countries, like Greece, for example. However, there is no evidence that a consensus emerged from the coverage of the so-called "migration crisis" in the three countries analyzed: Germany, Greece, and the United Kingdom. Overall, the editorial commentaries became engrossed in the crisis as it was unfolding, which eventually lead to increased polarization in all three countries. One could see the traditional media clashing over norms of what is appropriate to publish and what is deviant (ibid).

In conclusion, we must look back at the evolution of traditional media between 2019 and 2021, as explained in the first section of this chapter, to show that conditions can and should change for the better when discussing migration in the traditional German media.

## How German Media Discusses Migration: Social Media

While traditional media sources are oftentimes considered reputable due to their institutional ethical standards and fact-checking mechanisms, the same cannot always be said of social media platforms. For many participating in Facebook groups, X threads, Instagram posts, and TikTok reels and stories, users can post whatever they like, whether the information is factually correct or not. While many social media sites do hire fact-checkers and attempt to fight back against misinformation, oftentimes the sheer mass of posts is too much to counter, while other social media corporations grossly neglect this duty. This is to the detriment of those who the posts may be targeting, like immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. It is also important to note that younger people use social media more than older individuals,

and can be more dismissive of fake information and hate speech. According to a 2017 study by the German public broadcasting institutions, 59% of young Germans, aged 14–29-years old, use Facebook at least once a week, and 43% use the platform daily. Among those aged over 50, these statistics still amount to 22% and 13%, respectively. (Datts & Schultze, 2022; 469).

In a 2020 study, Karsten Müller and Carlo Schwarz investigate the link between social media and hate crimes in Germany. As mentioned throughout the report, Germany saw the largest increase of asylum seekers and refugees during 2015 and 2016. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, a nonprofit organization, registered an astounding 11,200 incidents of anti-refugee hate incidents between 2015 and 2019 (Müller & Schwarz, 2020). What, if any link, do these crimes have to social media? Müller and Schwarz looked at the Facebook presence of the German right-wing party, Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), which has a wider reach and more Facebook pages than any other political party in Germany. As mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, AfD is a far right-wing party, founded in 2013 as a more-or-less protest party that is opposed to immigration to Germany, as well as the European Union and what they see as an "invasion" of Islam brought by asylum seekers and refugees (Müller & Schwarz, 2020).Essentially, Müller and Schwarz argue that German regions with more active AfD Facebook users suffer more prevalent hate crimes, and vice versa (Müller & Schwarz, 2020). Civil rights groups identified content on AfD's pages that focused on refugees and deemed the content as "hate speech" which can potentially bring harm to those targeted. The authors note that hate crimes mostly take place in geographic areas where Facebook enjoys more traffic than other media platforms. In 2016 in Oschersleben, a fire occurred in a villa that accommodated refugees. After an official analysis, the police concluded it to be arson (Müller & Schwarz, 2020). Matthias Ekman (2019) analyzed Facebook posts and comments that could potentially "amplify antagonistic and violent behavior towards migrants" (Ekman, 2019, 606). The analysis is based on news sources and social media posts on Facebook. The study emphasizes that citizens are not only politically motivated, but can also be emotionally persuaded by such media platforms employing sentiments of mutual belonging or exclusion. The study highlights that racist sentiments and emotions are passed on to a large audience through Facebook groups, like that of the AfD and others. Members of these groups and people who see the groups' posts (whether influenced politically or organized in far-right groups) are more likely to practice anti-immigrant behavior than those who are not engaged in such online groups (Ekman, 2019). Finally, Datts and Schultze (2022) found that a right-wing ecosystem on Facebook has been established in Germany, thanks in large part to the AfDs presence. This has huge implications on elections and the way political parties operate.

## Responses to Media and Migration

While the media tended to speak about migration more positively in the last decade, the above-mentioned studies and reports on far-right media outlets show that negative narratives can confront migrants, particularly in the form of hate speech. This last section will explain what is being done to combat such hate speech.

Politically, the SPD, Greens, and FDP political parties have proposed overhauling German migrant and citizenship laws, strengthening integration of migrants into the society with a promise to allow migrants to hold dual citizenships (Bleiker & Brady, 2017). This proposal received positive reactions from migrants' rights groups on social media. On the one hand, migrants and migration rights groups voiced their enthusiastic support. On the other hand, right-wing groups criticized the proposal. To tackle hate crimes, the German parliament (Bundestag) passed a law in 2017 imposing fines on social media companies for not deleting online hate speech or offending posts (DW, 2017). While these proposals are a step in the right direction, more needs to be done when discussing migration in a nuanced and fair light in both traditional and social media channels.

# /Chapter Four

This chapter discusses the learnings from Chapters One through Three in respect to the development, production and positioning of the prototype and the steps taken in these phases.

## Starting Point for Development

As was discussed in Chapter Three, communication on social media is especially popular with the younger population, with a 2017 study suggesting that 59% of the 14 to 29 year-olds use Facebook at least once a week, and 43% use the network daily (Datts & Schultze, 2022). At the same time findings by Müller and Schwarz (2020) and Ekman (2019) show that, as political communication tools, social media is most actively used by migration-unfriendly actors, such as the AfD. Moreover, Datts and Schultze (2022) even describe a correlation between heavy use of social media, the occurrence of hate-related crimes, and the growth of what they call a right-wing ecosystem on Facebook.

For our creative group, these findings clearly meant that the target group of our prototype should be where the use and competition is most intense, thus the same age group. And our prototype should be conceived as content that could be communicated easily through social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram,

X or TikTok. They can be communicated sometimes in identical form, but they can also be easily adaptable to the specific formats of any of these platforms.

Virality: we wanted to use irony as a means to stir a narrative shift on the issue of migrants in Germany, because irony – being an unusual approach - goes viral. In other words, its unusualness attracts the audience's attention.
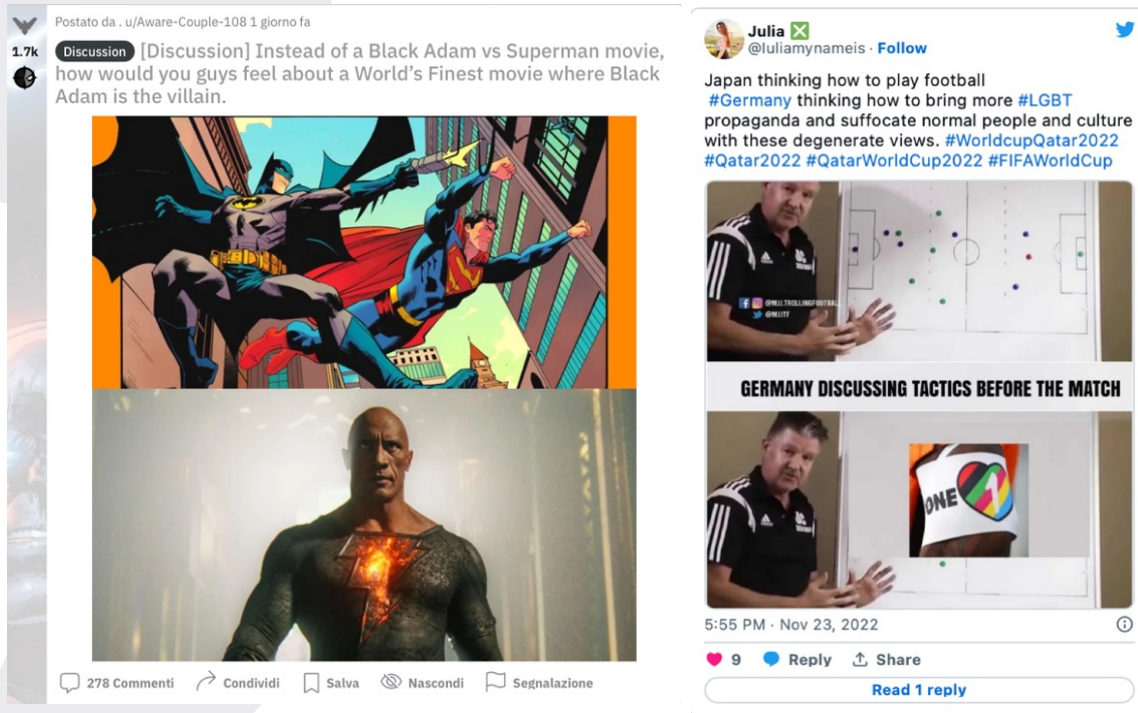


*Figure 1. Examples of viral irony in social media.*

**TAP** (Target Audience Precision):
We focused on reaching the so-called "mobile middle," that is 18-25 years old (sub:14-29).

**Proportionality:**
Consequently, we aimed to publish these comics in the platforms where our target audience usually acts, i.e., on social media, and more specifically on TikTok and Instagram.

**Scalability:**
In addition to this, we also wanted to appeal to a larger target audience (the comics potentially can reach a fork of 7–70-year-old readers).

**Cross-mediality:** contextually, and auspicating a further implementation of the E-Mindful project, our team is proposing a further step of distribution. The comics that we will distribute via Instagram could include a QR code that invites people to trigger a flashmob, such as (for instance) projecting our comics on walls in Germany: viewers will be able to take pictures of our comics projected on walls, tag them and repost them, which will further help to spread our campaign. In other words, the QR code would allow us to take our project out of the internet and social media and into the real world, setting up a visually tangible impact on the urban landscape in Germany.

Despite a slight deterioration in attitudes towards migrants in the general population and unfavorable media coverage, public opinion remains largely "stuck" in a polarity:
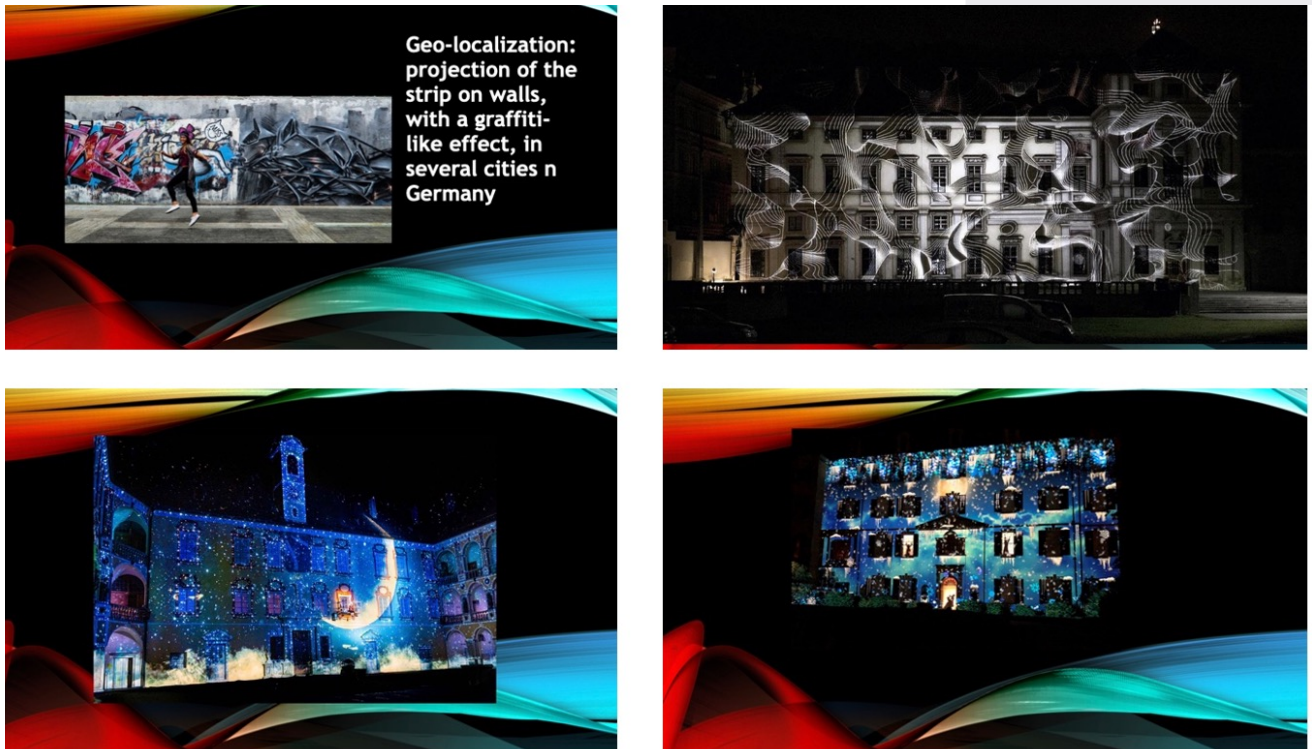


*Figure 2. Examples of video-mapping and wall projections.*

• on the one hand, humanitarian motives form a large part of general attitudes;
• on the other hand, there is a part of the public that is frightened when the various "risks" associated with the figure of the "foreigner" come to the fore.

A part of the audience oscillates between these two positions, and it is therefore called the "movable middle," whose age fork spans from 18 to 25 years-old. Such a "movable middle" appears to be relatively elastic, susceptible to fast-paced media and open to the acceptance of others as a moral obligation. That is why we decided to focus on this slice of the audience as our core target.

## Casting and Working with Artists

From December to March 2022, with the help of Randa Bashlah [4], MA, a young Syrian who now lives in Berlin and who works as an art curator, we first selected a panel of several Syrian comic artists of different age and gender and with different styles, who also live in Berlin. We gradually narrowed our selection through interviews, workshops and test prototypes, which we presented to a focus group, until we decided to produce the German team's prototype with Salam Al Hassan, a male artist in his forties, with a variegated array of characters and styles in his past experiences

4 Randa Bashlah, Journeys of Middle-Class Syrian Women to and in Berlin. Modes of Subjectivity, Possibilities and Becoming, A Thesis Submitted to Center of Migration and Refugee Studies Master of Arts (MA) in Migration and Refugee Studies, under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker, The American University in Cairo, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, December 1st, 2020.
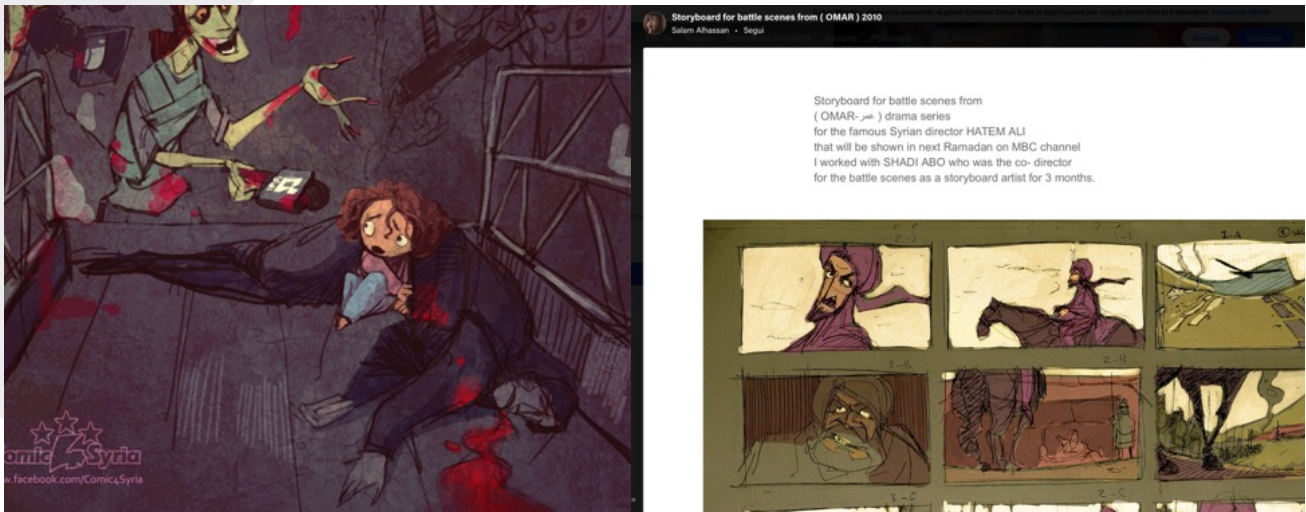
*Figure 3. Examples of Salam Al Hassan's previous work.*

## The Berlin Fox

With Salam, we developed a bold new character, a Berlin fox - one of the many foxes that live in the Berlin parks and appear from time to time to the amazement of unsuspecting park visitors.

We workshopped the idea and found that the Berlin Fox had the advantage of being simple, adaptable, relatable and easy to spread. Importantly, it also offered the possibility to be at the center of a series of stories, which we found ideal for the production of a prototype that also bears the promise of becoming more than just a prototype.

## Otherness

The fox is generally liked by everyone, but somewhat of a mystery in the urban landscape and thus an ideal cartoon-character for the projection of all forms of otherness in our short narratives. Moreover, the fox allowed us to create a character that is unspecific to any human (group) trying to find its place. As we showed in our presentation at the Torino workshop, and elaborated in the first chapter of this paper, while many people do migrate to Germany, also many, sometimes nearly as many, leave the country (again). This, for us, is the main finding of the report: that migrating to Germany/living in Germany, despite the opportunities and hard work invested, does not work out for many. That living in Germany does not work out to such a dramatic extent that many decide to leave. This group will invariably be diverse, so our fox is logically a diverse character representing less the groups arriving, and more so the diverse group trying to find a place.

In several languages, the fox is sometimes masculine, sometimes feminine; the

sexuality of a fox is neither a barrier for the story, nor is it evident, nor is it relevant for her/his/their quest.

Our focus groups helped us understand how diversity (and its natural inclusion) was central to successful communication on the subject and how we needed to shape our Berlin Fox stories accordingly. At the same time, it became very clear that we had to keep the setup simple for the benefit of the message.

## Different Social Media Uses

In conclusion, we will publish a comic strip every week via our social media channels. An extra-asset could be the publication of "making-of" sequences in time-lapse of the painting process that we see mostly used on TikTok.

Preparing our cartoon and its "making-of" for different social-media platforms is done in consideration of Instagram's algorithm prioritizing posts from users with a large following or a history of high-performing content. By contrast, TikTok is more egalitarian, serving up content whether the user is brand new to the platform or an old pro. One can go from being a nobody to a viral sensation in the space of a day, and this aspect matches the E-mindful needs.

The TikTok audience can engage with the person in a very open and reciprocal way. In fact, if there's one golden rule to making it big especially on TikTok (apart from studying the algorithm and tailoring your content to current trends), it's to let yourself go a little. "Don't take yourself too seriously," as Stephanie Hulbert-Thomas has suggested.

In a circular way, in a sort of ring-structure, this statement leads us back to the irony with which we decided to approach the theme, and confirms that irony is the key for reaching the movable middle in Germany. Further, it promises the virality of our content in the present-day social-media arena.

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