

THE LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN FRANCE

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Abstract: The refugee crisis in Europe has created a significant challenge for European policy makers, both in terms of receiving asylum seekers and integrating them into their new communities. Among other methods of refugee integration, the ability of asylum seekers to find work soon after arrival is particularly important to the future welfare of refugees and of their host countries. On this issue, the European response has been mixed: for example, France has historically taken a restrictive stance to prevent asylum seekers from working to make the country less attractive to “fake refugees,” while Sweden allows asylum seekers to work near instantly upon arrival in the hope they can find work quickly and sustain themselves as their claim is being evaluated. This paper evaluates best practices for the labor market integration of asylum seekers and refugees, before reviewing the historical development of labor market integration policies for asylum seekers in France since WWII. It uses the case of Sweden’s open labor market policy for asylum seekers to explain why France followed a different policy strategy, and finally suggest paths to improving the labor market integration of asylum seekers in France.

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Note: Undergraduate honors thesis submitted on 5/14/2017 as part of the requirements for graduation with honors from the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University.

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INTRODUCTION

Employment is a powerful factor increasing the likelihood of successful integration of refugees in a host country's economy and society. Able to sustain themselves and their families, refugees can end their dependence on their host country's public finances and learn how to integrate into their host communities. Employment gives refugees a social anchor around which they can rebuild their lives. It also gives them opportunities to socialize with their co-workers, deepening their understanding of their host communities' language, social norms, and legal environment. Thus, integrating refugees into the labor market is one of the most effective integration policy tools that governments can use to capture the full social and economic benefit of refugees and limit the tensions that may appear between them and their host communities. However, before being recognized as refugees and having access to many services designed to support their integration, many refugees spend months or years as asylum seekers. This has negative consequences on both future refugees and their host countries as integration measures for refugees are more effective the earlier they are implemented.

Today, the European Union (EU) faces a large inflow of asylum seekers, many fleeing conflict in Syria and Afghanistan. Some EU countries, such as Sweden and Germany, have implemented programs to actively encourage asylum seekers to begin working soon after arrival, or at least receive training to prepare them to enter the labor market. However, others have failed to implement active labor market policies for asylum seekers or even allow them to work while their claim is evaluated for months, if not years. France is a notable member of the second category of EU countries, having preventing asylum seekers from working since 1991. As the second largest economy in the European Union, France has a responsibility to be a leader in helping EU nations manage the massive increase since 2011 of the number of asylum seekers arriving (often irregularly) in EU countries, many fleeing civil war (Iraq, Syria) or political oppression (Eritrea, Sudan). Yet, France stands out in Europe for its particularly unwelcoming labor market policies for asylum seekers, with long asylum application processing times and no labor market integration measures targeting applicants during their wait. Among 30 OECD countries, only Luxembourg, Chile, and Switzerland had longer average durations from asylum application to decision than France's seven months. Among these countries, only Chile and France have no labor market integration policies for asylum seekers (OECD 2016a, 16-17). Despite France having long been a country of immigration, having attracted many foreign workers from its former colonial empire, it is failing to realize that it cannot deal with the refugee crisis as a short-term issue.

Meanwhile, another EU country, Sweden, has implemented a policy of opening its labor market to asylum seekers as soon as they enter the country and obtain an asylum seeker card. This policy has encouraged asylum seekers to find work quickly, improving their broader societal integration, and reduced the fiscal pressure of hosting them on the Swedish government. For many, Sweden has been the leading example of a country that has effectively welcomed the large increase in asylum seekers arriving in Europe since 2011 onto its labor market, just as it did in 1992 during the Bosnian genocide. Relative to France, Sweden stands on the opposite end of the labor market policy spectrum for asylum seekers, and is a useful contrast to illustrate the causes and effects of an open versus closed labor market for asylum seekers.

Considering the number of refugees seeking asylum across Europe and the importance of integration measures in determining the social and economic impact they will have on their local communities, France must eventually take on responsibility to integrate refugees, and particularly future refugees (i.e. asylum seekers), into its labor market and more broadly into its society. This paper will evaluate best practices for the labor market integration of asylum seekers and refugees, before reviewing the historical development of labor market integration policies for asylum seekers in France since World War II. I will use the case of Sweden's open labor market policy for asylum seekers to explain why France followed a different policy strategy, and finally suggest paths to improving the labor market integration of asylum seekers in France.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO THE LABOR MARKET

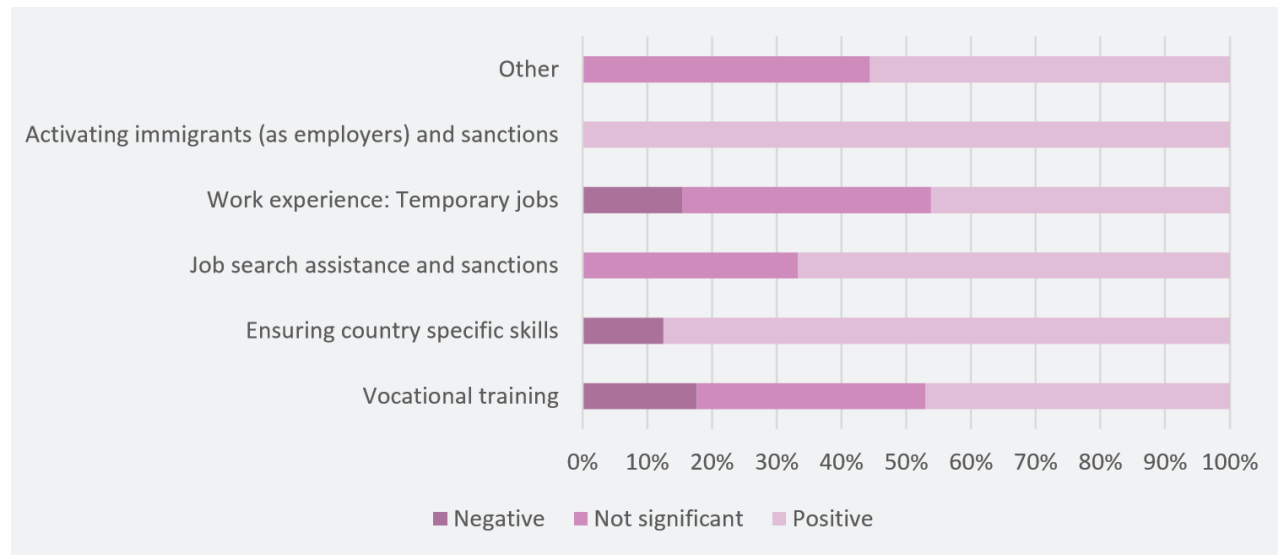
On October 24th, 2016, French authorities began dismantling the massive informal migrant camp on the outskirts of the northern port city of Calais known as ‘the Jungle’. According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), between 6,000 to 8,000 asylum seekers lived in the camp, hoping to cross the channel from France to the United Kingdom (Al Jazeera Oct. 2016). Many cited dismal opportunities for work in France as a reason to not seek asylum in the country. A few thousand were bused to asylum seeker reception centers across France, while many others refused to give up their dream of living in the United Kingdom and stayed behind. France’s President Francois Hollande stated the need to maintain public order and ensure the dignified treatment of migrants and refugees in his decision to order the “full and final” dismantling of the camp (CNN Sept. 2016). Yet, this is not the first time the Jungle has been dismantled, and will not be the last. It stands as a symbol of the failure of the European Union’s immigration and asylum policy, as well as a testament to the widespread sentiment among asylum seekers that France does not offer the same opportunities for them as other countries in Europe.

High unemployment rates and anti-refugee sentiment in France only explain part of the story: France, along with the United Kingdom, follow a policy strategy of preventing asylum seekers from working in any capacity while giving recognized refugees near-full labor market access (Martin et al. 2016, 43). This process would work if asylum applications were processed quickly, and refugees could begin working soon after arriving in their host country. However, in France, asylum seekers must wait an average of seven months, before a decision is made in first instance on their application and thus their eligibility to legally work in the country (OECD 2016a, 16). Some applications take far longer from submission to decision. According to a 2016 study produced by the Migration Policy Center (MPC):

the fact that asylum seekers are kept out of the labour market delays the integration of future refugees. [...] Several years spent in a situation of segregation, destitution or employment in the informal labour market may trigger a vicious circle and hamper access to the formal labour market once protection is obtained (Martin et al. 2016a, 28).

The fact that asylum seekers, many of which are potential refugees, are often left to wait months, if not years, to be able to work and to a certain extent live a normal life in their new host countries is deeply damaging. It negatively affects their personal well-being, as well as their potential contribution of their host countries, since one of the most prominent factors influencing the likelihood of successful resettlement is the ease and speed with which new asylum seekers and refugees could obtain decent employment (OECD 2016a, 16). According to Per Lundborg, “not only does employment yield income for the individual, but obtaining a job also improves knowledge about, for example, language, culture, and the functioning of the labor market, and creates networks, factors that all facilitate the integration process” (Lundborg 2013, 219). Dr. Özge Bilgili argues that the labor market integration of immigrants “is an essential component of their individual level structural integration in their new countries of settlement. It is now widely accepted that having a job and earnings that reflect one’s skills positively contributes [to] individuals’ well-being and can also positively influence their social integration” (Bilgili 2015, 22). In her review of 50 impact evaluations for immigrant labor market integration programs in 13 countries (86% of programs evaluated were implemented in European countries), Bilgili found the following rates of positive, not significant, and negative outcomes for different types of labor market integration programs. The main outcome variables used to evaluate the impact of these programs were employment rates, monthly earnings, and welfare dependency rates:

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF MAIN RESULTS BY CATEGORY OF IMMIGRANT LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION PROGRAM



Source: Bilgili 2015, 15.

Most labor market integration programs reviewed in this paper had a statistically significant positive effect. Bilgili later goes on to explain that negative or statistically insignificant effects of some temporary job and vocational training programs may have more to do with their implementation, which have led to stigmatization by native-born workers who may not benefit from these programs or training in skills that may not be demanded by employers (Bilgili 2017, 17-18). Without employment, asylum seekers are missing a critical avenue for creating connections with their communities, learning the local language, and finding a sense of purpose in their new environment. According to the conclusions of a 2015 study commissioned by the European Parliament, integrating asylum seekers onto the labor market “would have a positive effect for public perceptions of migration. It would, after all, challenge discourses about abuses to the welfare system and highlight their contribution to growth” (Martín et al. 2015, 66). For these reasons, employment is beneficial on a social level both for refugees, including asylum seekers, and for countries concerned with communitarianism preventing the smooth integration of these new arrivals into local communities.

From an economic and financial point of view, integrating asylum seekers onto the labor market as early as possible is also critical. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) produced a staff discussion paper in 2016 evaluating the economic impact of asylum seeker and refugee integration for the European economies in the long and short run. It found that:

The expected initial effects on aggregate EU GDP are positive but small, with a more significant impact on the countries where the refugee inflows are concentrated. [...] The medium-term impact can be larger and depends crucially on labor market integration [...] As long as the labor market performance of refugees falls short of the performance of the native population, their contribution to GDP will also be lower (Aiyar et al. 2016, 14).

The economic benefits of refugees are dependent on the success of their transition into employment, hence the need for strong labor market integration policies adapted to their situation. The Migration Policy Institute states additional reasons for integrating refugees into the labor market. The first is that the public cost of hosting employed refugees in the country is much lower than the cost of hosting inactive refugees, since the latter receive some form of social benefit, such as public housing, while they cannot support themselves. The second is that “since the large majority of refugees are below 35 years of age, they will

contribute to reduce the dependency rate (non-active/active population ratio) at least over the next 25 years,” although they will need to be working and paying taxes for this to happen (Martin et al. 2016a, 14-15).

In sum, the social benefits of work for both refugees and local communities are the greatest when refugees can live normal lives through stable work and residency status as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the economic benefits of refugees are greatest when they begin working soon after arrival in their new host country. Both the IMF and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) argue that it is essential for countries to allow asylum seekers to work as early as possible in the interest of encouraging their employment, which becomes more difficult with extended periods of inactivity, along with the economic and social benefits that result from their successful labor market integration (Aiyar et al. 2016, 17; Martin et al. 2016a, 15). As many asylum seekers are future refugees, host countries should create policies to enable and encourage them to find employment or at minimum prepare them to enter the workforce as their claim is being processed.

BEST PRACTICES FOR A STRONG LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION POLICY

A strong labor market integration policy combines rapid access for asylum seekers to their host country's labor market and policies that facilitate their entry on the labor market. In this line, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), a migration policy analysis tool sponsored by the United Nations and the European Union, lays out a best-case scenario for migrants arriving in their new countries:

A migrant with the right to work and live in the country has the same chances as everyone else in the labour market. From day one in the country, she and her family members can start applying for any job in the private or public sector. She gets her qualifications from abroad recognised. She can then improve her skills through training and study grants. The state encourages her by targeting her specific needs - for example, she can take language courses focused on her profession. Job mentors and trained staff help her assess skills and use public employment services. Once employed, she has the same rights as all workers in the country.

These policies would be undoubtedly to the benefit of an asylum seeker trying to establish themselves in their new country, with the best results expected with an effective implementation of all these complementary policies. A few labor market integration policies do stand out, however, as the most effective for getting immigrants, including asylum seekers, into employment. Dr. Özge Bilgili, based on her analysis of the results of 50 studies of labor market integration programs for immigrants, concludes that “besides the policies that are targeted towards immigrants only like the language courses, overall, active labour market programmes work more or less in the same way for immigrants and natives” (Bilgili 2015, 24). Vocational training combined with job experience was the most effective labor market integration policy, both for natives and immigrants, in terms of increasing employment rates and monthly earnings and decreasing welfare dependency, and it could be cost-effective to consolidate these programs to serve both groups (Bilgili 2015, 24; Martin et al. 2016a, 47). Consolidating these programs would also help “avoid the appearance that immigrants are receiving more support than native-born individuals,” improving the likelihood that the program will be well received by domestic workers (Papademetriou and Benton 2016, 63). In a study of Germany's welfare-to-work policy, Martin Huber, Michael Lechner, Conny Wunsch, and Thomas Walter found that “short training, which is a combination of job-search assistance, work-tests and minor adjustment of skills, has on average a significant positive effect on self-sufficient employment” (Huber et al. 2009, 31). Sebastian Butschek and Thomas Walter produced a meta-analysis of studies on immigrant employment programs, and found that only wage subsidy programs for immigrant workers led to mostly consistent increases in employment rates of immigrants. They found the employment effects of training to be insignificant, although they did not distinguish between classroom and on-the-job training programs, with the latter being expected to be most effective according to Bilgili (Butschek and Walter 2014, 14). These meta-analyses set out two key policies that governments should consider adapting to their national contexts as they move to better integrate refugees and asylum seekers into their labor markets.

The way these policies are implemented is equally important for their success. In *Refugees to Workers* (2016), Martin et al. outline three principles that influence the success of labor market integration policy measures based on the study of labor market integration policies and programs for asylum seekers and refugees in nine EU-member countries. The first is that “the bigger the certainty about the legal status of the asylum seekers and the shorter the period leading to the recognition of the international protection status, the easier they will integrate into the labour market”. This is especially important considering the common confusion among migrants and asylum seekers as to the rights and services available to them, as well as among potential employers who may be wary of hiring employees with ambiguous rules governing their right to work. The second is that “the sooner the intervention, the bigger the chances that labour market integration support measures have a positive impact,” hence the need for these measures to be applied to asylum seekers and not only those with refugee status. The third is that labor market integration policies should be tailor-made to “the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the asylum seekers and refugees” (Martin et al. 2016a, 47). Incorporating language courses as part of a labor market integration program is one example of many services that may be needed by asylum seekers to adapt to their new host countries. However, in order to create targeted policies for asylum seekers, governments must also develop a labor market information system (LMIS) to identify the skills needed by employers, those available among the asylum seeker and refugee populations, and the skill and knowledge gaps preventing the establishment of employment relationships. This requires a network of both state and non-state actors to accurately collect information on labor supply, but in many European countries some form of a LMIS is already in action and can be expanded to support employment policies for asylum seekers and refugees.

A 2016 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) titled “Making Integration Work: Refugees and Others in Need of Protection” compiled several lessons European countries have learned as they have attempted to address the Syrian refugee crisis. Of these lessons, two are directly related to improving the labor market integration of refugees. The first is that asylum seekers with high prospect for being allowed to stay should be allowed to enter their host country’s labor market as early as possible to avoid them entering informal work, causing a gap in their employment history that may depreciate their skills and experiences for future employment (OECD 2016a, 18).

Although not mentioned in the report, allowing asylum seekers to work as early as possible would also reduce the risk for them to be exploited by an employer in the unregulated informal economy. Without the ability to legally work and a stipend too small to support themselves, asylum seekers can be forced to accept jobs offering pay and working conditions below national standards. In some cases, they may become trapped in situations of forced labor. Even EU-citizen workers are not immune to fall into this situation of exploitation: to give an example, a 2015 report by Letizia Palumbo and Alessandra Sciarba details the situations of forced labor and sexual exploitation faced by Romanian women in southern Italy (Palumbo and Sciarba 2015). The vulnerabilities of citizens and illegally employed asylum seekers to exploitation are different, with the latter being at risk of deportation if discovered. However, eliminating the need for asylum seekers to accept illegal employment to sustain themselves while their application is being processed would help prevent their exploitation by employers.

The second lesson is that asylum seekers and refugees should be settled in areas where jobs are readily available, not only where there is cheap housing (OECD 2016a, 22). This is a simple lesson, although in many countries refugees have been settled in areas with limited opportunities for employment, creating tension between them and other workers competing for a small number of jobs.

Variations of these labor market integration programs have already been implemented in a few countries in Europe. In Sweden, an “introduction program” facilitates the employment of immigrants through its “recent focus on integrated language instruction, more labor-oriented activation measures, and intensive personal counseling” with the goal of encouraging their transition to regular employment (Aiyar et al. 2016, 21). The IMF also points to the use of temporary work agencies by governments in Denmark and the Netherlands as a stepping stone for immigrants to access full employment as a promising policy

avenue to explore, although these raise the risk of placing immigrants in an extended state of precariousness through the temporary nature of their employment.

However, in France, labor market integration programs that target asylum seekers have yet to be implemented. In fact, France actively prevents asylum seekers from working. Although there is room for discussion over which policies are the most effective in bringing refugees onto the labor market, as outlined throughout this section, the consensus is that refugees are best integrated onto the labor market as early as possible. The European Parliament, the IMF, and the OECD have gone further and recommend that asylum seekers should be target by labor market integration programs and allowed to work soon after they have arrived in their host country. The following analysis of the historical development of France's restrictive labor market policies for asylum seekers, contrasted with that of Sweden and its open labor market, helps to explain why France made these choices and the different impact they have had on asylum seekers, native workers, and the country's ability to effectively address the refugee crisis facing Europe.

CASE STUDY: FRANCE

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH LABOR MARKET POLICY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

After the Second World War, France made little distinction between refugees and economic migrants. The country was facing a labor shortage, and sought to import labor from abroad through a variety of pathways. Between 1945-1946, the country imported around 3,000 workers from displaced persons' camps in occupied Germany and Austria. France also signed an agreement with Italy to import 20,000 Italian workers to work in the mines, yet ultimately only received 3,000. According to Alexis Spire, many potential workers refused to move to France because of the government's demand for "direct immigration," that is for workers to arrive without their family members. Because of France's high demand for workers, asylum seekers who arrived in France by their own means represented a convenient source of labor and so were offered jobs in industries facing labor shortages. In 1948, the Bureau for the Orientation and Placement of Refugees (BOPRE) was created in Paris, and by 1949 similar bureaus were set up in cities across France to regularize asylum seekers, verify their professional qualifications, and place them in industries in need of workers. At the time, these were mining and agriculture, and few job offers were made outside of those industries. In 1950, the French Minister of Labor formalized these limitations by stating:

France is not currently ready to receive new foreigners on its soil that do not belong to the rare professional activities where the labor force remains deficient: mining and agriculture. In these conditions, it appears necessary to end the current disorder that reigns in the domain of refugee admission in France, which is harmful to our public finances and affects the conditions of existence of our workers¹ (own translation)

The Ministry of Labor went on to advise French labor officials to deny work permits to refugees wishing to work in industries with high rates of unemployment and instead offer them work permits for other professions, chosen by the officials at their discretion based on the qualifications of the asylum applicant. Clearly, the primary goal of these labor market placement programs was not to facilitate the integration of refugees but to exploit their economic potential to fuel the French economy (Spire 2004, 2-3). This was paired with a stated preference for the welfare of French workers over the welfare of asylum seekers fleeing persecution abroad. This concern for protecting French workers was again expressed during negotiations on the application of the Geneva Convention on the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, which France signed in 1951 but only applied in 1954. Most of the reticence to signing and applying this convention came

¹ France. Ministry of Labor. *Circulary of February 20, 1950. art. 4* in Spire, Alexis. "Les réfugiés, une main-d'œuvre à part ? Conditions de séjour et d'emploi, France, 1945-1975." *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 20, no. 2 (2004). 4. DOI : 10.4000/remi.963

from the Ministry of Labor, which expressed concerns about losing its ability to shield the French workforce from foreign competition (Spire 2004, 5).

Yet, the French government's official policy of restricting the labor market access of immigrant workers, including asylum seekers, was weak in practice. According to Gary Freeman, "the period from 1946 to 1967 can be characterized as one in which there was at least an unofficial tolerance and even encouragement of "spontaneous" immigration. This was carried out primarily by individual firms who either actively recruited workers abroad or hired them when they appeared at their plants" (Freeman 1979, 77). The "cumbersome procedures" of the National Immigration Office (ONI), in charge of the implementing France's policy of "selective migration," and "its poor reception of migrants" were largely avoided both by employers and by those seeking work in the country (Martin and Miller 1980, 318). Once employed, these immigrant workers could usually get their status regularized and receive a work permit allowing them to continue their work legally. This was especially prevalent in the 1960s, where an "enormous foreign worker influx" arrived in this manner:

By 1968, fully 82 percent of registered migrant workers had their status legalized *de facto*" [i.e. arrived irregularly or as tourists, before changing their status]. Despite the semblance of an organized program for labor migration to France, a *de facto* policy of benign neglect was followed by the government. Labor migration generally was uncontrolled and spontaneous (Martin and Miller 1980, 318).

Without a cumbersome pathway to legal immigration and easy *de-facto* regularization, many immigrants through the 1960s in France chose the latter route. Many refugees likely avoided applying for asylum during this period, as arriving as a tourist or irregularly was a more straightforward option.

This changed in the early 1970s. Amid increasing social tensions and the 1973 oil crisis, like many other governments in Europe, France chose assert control over migration. It ended the practice of regularization for migrants who arrived in the country irregularly, overcoming employer opposition to immigration restriction, and began to encourage immigrants from outside the European Union to return to their home countries (Martin and Miller 1980, p. 318). In 1974, the government decided to suspend all work-related immigration to France (Spire 2004, 9).

It was also then that France began differentiating the access of refugees and asylum seekers to the labor market relative to other immigrant labor. As the government suspended work-related immigration, it also established special provisions for refugees, allowing them to retain their access to the labor market (Spire 2004, 9). This marked the first instance of a specific labor regime for refugees in France, satisfying the country's constitutional duty to grant asylum to individuals persecuted for actions in favor of liberty as well as the UN Refugee Convention of 1951.²³

Yet, during this period, a dichotomy appeared between refugees and asylum seekers. The French image of refugees in the 1970s was the "boat people" fleeing communist Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (former French Indochina), who were almost automatically entitled to refugee status in France. Meanwhile, asylum seekers who had to wait for a decision to be made on their application were viewed with suspicion as someone who could be pretending to be an asylum seeker to work in France. This difference based on country of origin was reinforced as asylum seekers from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, unlike other asylum seekers, were given provisional work permits upon request. A year later (1976), however, those rights to receive a residence and work permits (for six months, renewable until a decision has been made on their

² France. Constitution of October 27, 1946, Preamble.

³ This convention defines a refugee as an individual persecuted for their race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinions. It also states that refugees should not be returned to a country where they face such a threat.

refugee application) were extended to all asylum seekers as soon as they submitted their application (Spire 2004, 9).

The labor market access of asylum seekers in France was relatively secure for the next 15 years. However, asylum applications increased rapidly from 19,000 in 1980 to 55,000 in 1990, with acceptance rates declining from 85% to 15% over the same period (Fassin and Kobelinsky 2012, 666). If the criteria for judging asylum remained the same, the explanation for this drop in the percentage could be that less asylum applicants had legitimate claims. However, Didier Fassin and Carolina Kobelinsky (2012) argue that this reversal of the refugee application acceptance rate, which contributed to influencing public opinion against assisting asylum seekers, was due to a change in the evaluation criteria, rather than a change in the authenticity of the asylum seekers arriving in France. According to them, an increasing zeal to separate “real” asylum seekers from “fake” asylum seekers, in the interest of “defending” the asylum system, led to French officials being more critical of applicants and rejecting applicants who were not convincing enough for a variety of reasons (Fassin and Kobelinsky 2012, 666). The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), responsible for evaluating asylum claims in France, argue that the decline in the asylum application acceptance rate reflected their increasing effectiveness in distinguishing “real” and “fake” refugees as more asylum seekers turned out to be applying for non-humanitarian reasons. By placing more doubt on the veracity of asylum seekers’ claims and artificially limiting its access to it, OFPRA officials are defending the value of asylum as if it was a finite resource, to the detriment of many legitimate asylum seekers who may not provide enough evidence for their case or simply fail to convince OFPRA with their testimony in their face-to-face interview (2012, 679).

Increasingly, French public opinion saw an asylum system that was out of control and believed “fake refugees” were exploiting the system to be able to work in France. Once again, asylum seekers were viewed with suspicion, as individuals exploiting the generosity of the French asylum system for their economic benefit. In 1989, the Prime Minister of the ruling Socialist Party (PS) government, Michel Rocard, made a speech at the National Assembly against accepting any more irregular immigrants or “fake” asylum seekers:

We cannot welcome all the misery in the world. France must stay as it is, a land of political asylum but nothing more. [...] Nevertheless, we know that no government has the power, even if it wanted to, to make our country some sort of impervious bunker [from irregular immigration]. [...] From this observation, some consider the only solution is to build a reputation of rigor abroad enough to dissuade immigration. Let’s make it so, they say, that candidates for clandestine immigration know that our borders are impenetrable, and they will give up coming (translated by author).⁴

This speech set the tone for the policies established in France a few years later to stop the asylum application process being (supposedly) used by irregular immigrants to work in France.

In 1991, amid the public debate around fake refugees and the decline in the percentage of positive decisions on asylum claims from OFPRA, France restricted the right of asylum seekers to work until a positive decision on their asylum application is made. The permission for asylum seekers to remain in France while their asylum application was being processed, a right ensured by the 1951 Refugee Convention, no longer included the right to work (Bank 2000, 273). Many other countries in Europe, seeing increasing numbers of asylum applications, implemented similar restrictions on the right to work of asylum seekers (Valenta and Thorshaug 2013, 460). Proponents of this change could argue that since only 15% of asylum claims were successful in 1990, it no longer made sense to treat asylum seekers as presumptive refugees. However, as stated before, part of the reason that these acceptance rates dropped so low was at least partly due to OFPRA’s zeal in evaluating candidates and rejecting those who could not prove with

⁴ France. Assemblée Nationale. Journal Officiel. Compte Rendu Intégral: Séance du mardi 6 juin 1989. ISSN 0249-3088 0242-6765 . Paris, France: Assemblée Nationale, 1989. 1797.

certainty that they were fleeing persecution directed at them as individuals. Civil war in an applicant's home country, for example, does not qualify under OFPRA's rules as a valid reason for granting asylum, as the danger is not targeting the individual specifically.

Advocates of France's restrictive immigration strategy could have argued that it was successful in reducing the number of asylum seekers, many of which, according to them, were fake. The number of refugees in France declined from 1993 to 2003. Yet, since 2003, the number of refugees in France has consistently increased every year, along with the number of asylum applications since 2008. From 2009 to 2011, France had the highest number of first-time asylum applicants in the European Union. To adjust to this increase in applications, OFPRA is trying to improve its ability to decide on asylum applications quickly to keep average waiting times for asylum seekers low and deport "fake" refugees more quickly. Nevertheless, France's efforts to deter asylum seekers from coming to France has not succeeded in stopping the flow of asylum seekers even as the majority of asylum seekers continue to be rejected (71% rejected in first-instance in 2016).⁵ This opens this stage for a rethinking of France's labor market integration policy for asylum seekers, which need to be reformed to take into account the continued arrival of supposedly "fake" refugees.

FRANCE'S LABOR MARKET POLICY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS TODAY

Individuals seeking asylum in France must submit their application to the Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), which will then take on average seven months to process asylum applications (OECD 2016a, 16). However, according to the Dublin III EU immigration regulations, asylum seekers must apply for asylum in the country where they first entered the EU. This means that if a potential asylum seeker has been fingerprinted by law enforcement or submitted an asylum application in another EU member state, they cannot seek asylum in France. Once a person has received refugee or subsidiary protection (a one-year status that is renewable based on continued threats in a person's home country), they can live and work legally in France. Once recognized, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are required to sign an "accommodation and integration contract", by which they commit to respect the fundamental values of France and to attend: a civic training program, an information session on life in France, and language classes, if necessary. The first two are one-day sessions, which seem wholly inadequate to prepare refugees for life in France. However, by signing the contract, refugees also gain access to individualized help to determine their professional competencies and potential, and to develop a strategy to find employment (Boring 2016). The effectiveness of these refugee integration policies is not the subject of this paper, but this short description shows that there are at minimum some policies and programs in place to facilitate the labor market integration of refugees in France.

However, these refugee integration policies do not apply to asylum seekers in France. Since 1991, asylum seekers have not been able to work legally, and government programs to assist refugees in France are only available to those who have been granted refugee status, leaving asylum seekers to be provided the minimum rights according to international law (the right to remain in the country until their claim is decided) before most of them are ordered deported. By continuing to prevent asylum seekers from working while their application claim is being evaluated, France hopes to close a potential route through which foreign economic migrants would be able to access the French labor market and compete with domestic workers. After explicitly using asylum seekers as labor to fuel certain sectors of its economy, France is denying all asylum seekers the right to work, relegating them to outsiders waiting till their claim to refugee status can be verified. French officials use the specter of "fake refugees" to justify these restrictions on the rights of asylum seekers (Fassin and Kobelinsky 2012, p. 659). These restrictions force asylum seekers into an extended state of limbo where they do not benefit from refugee status and yet are not expelled. They wait months for a decision to be made, wasting time that could be used to better integrate in their new

⁵ "Premiers chiffres de l'asile en France en 2016." OFPRA. January 31, 2017. Accessed May 13, 2017. <https://ofpra.gouv.fr/fr/1-ofpra/actualites/premiers-chiffres-de-l-asile-en-0>.

community. The lack of benefits, tiny subsistence allocations, and a long waiting time supposedly help dissuade disingenuous asylum applicants from pursuing this route to living in France.

As mentioned previously, this has severe negative consequences on the social and economic integration of future refugees, and places strain on public administrations to provide housing and subsistence income for them. Until they are recognized as refugees, asylum seekers may receive emergency housing and a monthly subsistence allocation (AMS) of 91 euros/month. However, in 2015, “only a third of those who seek asylum across France [were] provided with accommodation in reception centers for asylum seekers” (Human Rights Watch 2015). If no housing is available, asylum seekers can receive the temporary waiting allocation (ATA) of 343.5 euros/month. For comparison, the minimum wage in France is 1466.62 euros/month as of January 2016. Asylum seekers are thus expected to survive on ~23% of the national minimum wage. The French Court of Audits estimated that, in 2013, the direct cost of France’s asylum policy was 690 million euros.⁶ Not only are France’s policies detrimental to the wellbeing and employment potential of future refugees, they are also incredibly expensive.

Efforts to improve the welfare of asylum seekers are exclusively focused on providing more public housing and reducing the waiting period for a decision to be made on asylum claims. In 2004, the French Senate commented on the efforts of OFPRA to reduce the asylum processing time, taking care to emphasize the importance of reducing processing times on average as well as processing times for “complex” asylum claims that often take more than a year. The Senate report refers to the case of a Turkish asylum claimant who had to wait 697 days to receive a decision on their application.⁷ In 2013, President Francois Hollande promised to bring the maximum waiting time for decisions on asylum applications to six months (Francois 2013). In 2015, PM Valls’s government passed legislation requiring OFPRA to process asylum claims within nine months (with a few exceptions). Since then, OFPRA reports that they have reduced the average processing time from application to decision in first instance from seven months in 2015 to five in 2016, with a goal of achieving an average waiting period of three months in 2017.⁸ While these efforts to reduce the waiting period for asylum seekers are laudable on their face, as they reduce the time refugees are left without access to the labor market and many refugee support programs, they: (1) don’t solve the problem of asylum seekers having to wait multiple months without the ability to work or without labor market integration support measures; (2) raise questions on the quality of the sorting being done by OFPRA to deliver responses in a shorter period of time, creating further risk for asylum seekers to be wrongfully denied refugee status.

On July 29, 2015, the French government passed its only major reform to its asylum policies in recent years to comply with the European Union’s Reception Conditions Directive 2013/33/EU, which governs standards for the reception of asylum seekers. In addition to setting the maximum waiting period to nine months, the law also allows asylum seekers to apply for work authorization if (1) OFPRA does not decide on their application for asylum after nine months (previously 12), (2) this delay cannot be attributed to the asylum seeker, and (3) they have an offer of employment (Martin et al. 2016a, 13). The asylum seeker must then apply for a foreigner work permit to the Regional Direction for Companies, Competition, Consumption, Work and Employment (DIRECCTE). This permit allows for an asylum seeker to be employed, but they still cannot be legally self-employed. However, “it has the same validity as the asylum seeker’s temporary residence permit, which is renewable every three months,” which may make employers wary of hiring someone for such a short period, regardless of the prospects for renewal (Martin et al. 2016b, 53-54). The work permit is also only granted if there is no French or European citizen, or foreigner already

⁶ France. Court des Comptes. *Référé sur l'accueil et l'hébergement des demandeurs d'asile*. By Didier Migaud to Prime Minister Manuel Valls. No. S 2015 0977 1 ed. July 30, 2015. 5.

⁷ France. Senat. *L'OFPRA : impératif de performance administrative et exigences du droit d'asile*. Rapport r05-401. 2004. <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r05-401/r05-4013.html>

⁸ "Premiers chiffres de l'asile en France en 2016." OFPRA. January 31, 2017. Accessed May 03, 2017. <https://ofpra.gouv.fr/fr/l-ofpra/actualites/premiers-chiffres-de-l-asile-en-0>.

holding a work permit, able to be employed. By creating a new bottom position for work permit-holding asylum seekers in the hierarchy of who ‘deserves’ first rights over any job opening, the French government emphasizes how little it values the employment success of asylum seekers. In fact, it puts further barriers to work in the way of someone in an already very disadvantaged position on the labor market, arriving in the country with little to no social connections, a likely nonexistent or tenuous command of French, and who may still be suffering from the trauma they experienced in their country of origin.

These administrative hurdles make it so that very few work permits are granted to asylum seekers. According to the Article R341-4 of the French Labor Code, “the denial of a work permit must be motivated with statistical data” (Martin et al. 2016b, 53-54). Interviews indicate that “in practice, very few asylum seekers apply for a work permit [and] the vast majority of work permit requests are denied based on the unemployment rates recorded in the requested sector” (Martin et al. 2016b, 53-54). Symbolizing the ineffectiveness of this policy for asylum seekers looking for work, the head of the DIRECCTE office in Paris stated that, in 2015, only one work permit was granted to an asylum seeker from Iraq willing to work as a translator. Furthermore, although “article 744-11 of CESEDA provides that asylum seekers who have been granted access to the labour market can benefit from professional training,” no training programs have been launched (Martin et al. 2016b, 53-54). Considering the few asylum seekers who gain access to the labor market at all in France, the reason for this is presumably the lack of participants.

Because of these caveats, the nine-month maximum waiting period before being able to legally work in France is effectively irrelevant. Asylum seekers will not receive any labor market integration support besides that provided by non-governmental organizations until they are officially recognized as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection after months of waiting. According to Martin et al.:

The French authorities have consistently maintained that asylum seekers should not be targeted with integration measures. [...] once an individual obtains international protection (i.e. becomes a refugee), he/she enters the regime of common law (2016a, 27).

However, this is far too long for potential refugees to wait before being able to legally work. As argued previously, the benefits of employment for the overall integration of refugees are highest the earlier they enter the labor market. By refusing to make efforts to integrate asylum seekers into the labor market, France’s policies negatively impact the social and economic integration of future refugees.

In October 2015, the French Court of Audits released a letter addressed to the Prime Minister explaining its findings on the reception of asylum seekers in France. It noted that, on average, 74% of asylum requests were rejected every year between 2009 and 2013. Most asylum seekers were denied refugee status and thus legally obligated to leave the country or face deportation. Yet, more than 96% of rejected asylum seekers stayed in France, since deportation orders were very weakly enforced, living and working illegally in the country outside the protection of the law. The Court determined that the government was de-facto accepting this situation: stuck between the principle to allow vulnerable individuals to stay in the country and its immigration laws that demand foreigners be deported if they overstay, it allowed rejected asylum seekers to remain informally in the country at rates higher than other irregular immigrants.⁹

Although the French administration may appear tough on “fake refugees” for thoroughly reviewing claims for asylum and rejecting a large majority of them, it shirks at carrying out the logical conclusion of its policy: the removal of failed asylum seekers, fake refugees, from the country. Naturally, the mass deportation of failed asylum seekers would be a very unpopular decision for the government to take. If the divide between real and fake refugees was clearly delineated, then enforcing this policy would be much easier. Instead, most asylum seekers in France are left to join the informal economy after a failed asylum

⁹ France. Court des Comptes. *Référé sur l'accueil et l'hébergement des demandeurs d'asile*. By Didier Migaud to Prime Minister Manuel Valls. No. S 2015 0977 1 ed. July 30, 2015. 8.

application or remain in public housing until conditions in their origin countries improve. Eventually, they may return home to face whatever threat they had originally fled, preferring that to the endless wait and social isolation in a country that rejects them. This situation is untenable for many asylum seekers, resulting in regularization campaigns led by “illegal” immigrants of all types (“sans-papiers”) (Freedman 2009, 347).

Not only is France one of the hardest places in Europe for asylum seekers to receive the right to work, labor market integration support, and even to be recognized as refugees, it is also one of the countries in the OECD where future refugees spend the longest time as asylum seekers. The situation is not helped by France’s highly regulated labor market, which makes decent informal work opportunities few and far between compared to other European countries (Reyneri 2001, 49). Pushed further underground, informal work can lead to potentially even worse employment conditions and criminal activity. If asylum seekers cannot find informal employment, they must survive on the meager allowance given by the French government for asylum seekers in waiting. Regardless, while relying on the French government for subsistence income, asylum seekers are liable to be resented by the public for being provided monthly income despite not working and having never paid into the welfare system. Without the ability to work in the short and even medium terms, it is no wonder that many asylum seekers are congregating in informal camps around Calais, hoping to move on to the United Kingdom instead of settling in France.

ANALYSIS

EXPLAINING FRENCH LABOR MARKET POLICY: THE PULL-FACTOR THESIS

The current treatment of asylum seekers in France has its roots in the economic slowdown in the 1980s and the idea that many asylum seekers are fake refugees using the protections of asylum for their economic benefit. When the French economy was facing labor shortages, asylum seekers were seen by the government as a convenient way of addressing these shortages, regardless of the validity of their claim. Yet, once the economy began to slow down and unregulated immigration became politically intolerable, refugees were singled out among other categories of workers for protection. This made them beneficiaries of special privileges relative to other foreign workers, while also making them targets. As the number of asylum applications nearly tripled between 1980 and 1990 and 85% of asylum applications were being rejected, it became easy for French policy makers and the public to treat asylum seekers with suspicion. Since immigration policy in France was “announced through the issuance of terse communiques or the publication of circulars, decrees, or economic plans” and “the structure of the French policy machinery was not conducive to wide public involvement,” the French government was easily able to alter its immigration strategy to fit the political objectives of the moment (Freeman 1979, 118).

French Prime Minister Michel Rocard (1988-1991) and other proponents of this restrictive labor policy argued that refugees truly wanted safety, not work. Hence, France’s humanitarian (and even constitutional) responsibility is fulfilled by simply allowing asylum seekers to remain in the country while their application is being evaluated. “True refugees” would not care if they can obtain employment in their new country, because that is not their goal. Rather, the primary objective of refugees is to get out of reach of whatever threat they are escaping from (Mayblin 2016, 817). In this case, the ability of asylum seekers to obtain a worker permit is unnecessary for refugees and only serves to attract people migrating for purely economic reasons to apply as asylum seekers. Eliminating the right to work while an asylum claim is being evaluated would remove that incentive to exploit the asylum system, reducing the number of ‘fake’ asylum seekers. However, in a study of the United Kingdom, where the right of asylum seekers to work has been restricted since 2002, Lucy Mayblin argues that the ‘pull-factor thesis’ is a well-established “policy imaginary” based on a common-sense assumption but nevertheless questioned by a large body of evidence against it. She points to multiple studies that have shown that the unemployment rate or ability for asylum seekers to work in a host country had no impact on the number of asylum applications (Mayblin 2016, 818).

Mayblin also quotes a study conducted for the United Kingdom's Home Office before the work restrictions for asylum seekers were implemented which found that:

There was very little evidence that [asylum seekers] had a detailed knowledge of: UK immigration or asylum procedures; entitlements to benefits in the UK; or the availability of work in the UK. There was even less evidence that the respondents had a comparative knowledge of how these phenomena varied between different European countries (Robinson and Segrott 2002, viii).

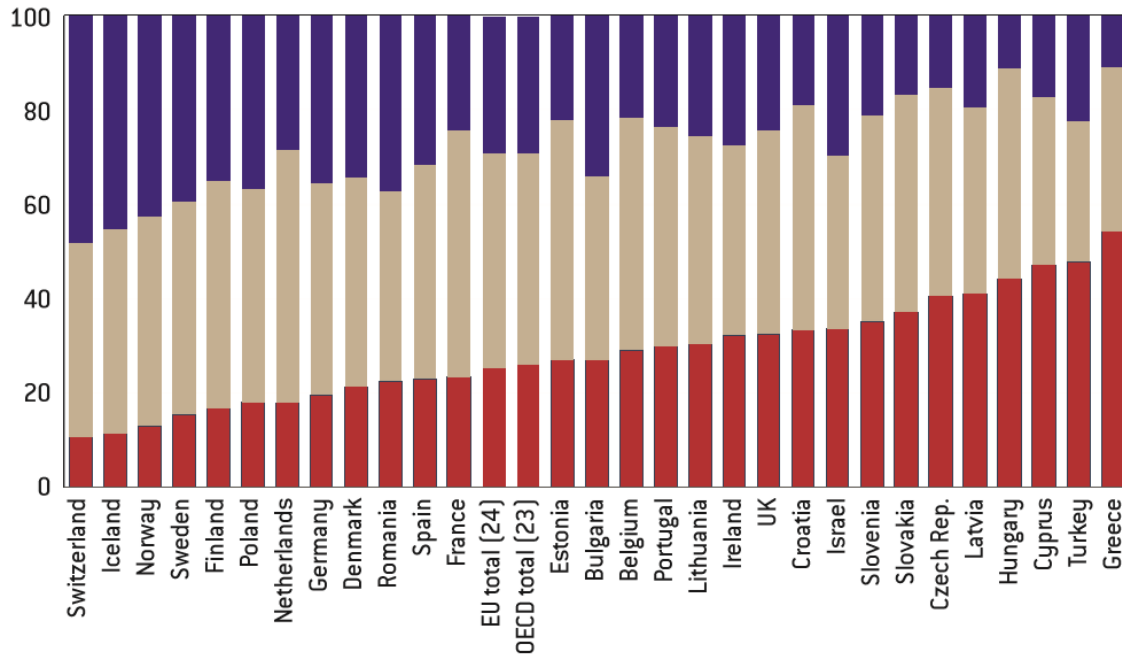
These studies have shown that technical changes in asylum policy or fluctuating economic indicators are unlikely to affect the decision for asylum seekers on where to migrate. Much stronger factors in an eventual destination choice include personal connections in the destination country and prior proficiency in the country's language. Regardless of its validity, advocates for restricting access to work for asylum seekers discount the very humanity of refugees. Refugees leave their country not just to survive: part of resettlement is restoring a sense of normalcy in their lives, including by being able to work and earn wages to sustain themselves.

Also behind this interest in dissuading "fake refugees" from applying for asylum, supposedly to help better defend the institution of asylum for the "real refugees," is a desire to limit immigration in general. Valenta and Thorshaug write: "by giving asylum seekers access to the labour market, some claim that one could create increased competition for jobs, with worse conditions for the native labour force" (2013, 462). In France, where 10% of the labor force was unemployed in the last quarter of 2016, this argument is particularly salient:

While most studies suggest that immigrants are typically complements rather than substitutes to natives in the labour market, and that immigrants are net payers to the welfare system rather than net receivers, native citizens have often a quite different view (Bordignon et al. 2016, 70).

The general opinion in France remains that the country should not accept more refugees and asylum seekers, at least until economic conditions improve and domestic workers can find jobs. According to the OECD, in 2008, only around 25% of French people thought that immigrants had a positive economic impact on their country of destination, which places the country among those EU countries with the least favorable opinions of the economic impact of immigrants. Meanwhile, countries like Sweden, Norway, Germany, and Switzerland had much more favorable views of immigrants (Bordignon and Moriconi 2017, 8). While asylum seekers are a special category of immigrants, the perception that few asylum seekers are genuine refugees allows for them to be often lumped into the same category as economic migrants. Thus, asylum seekers are affected by the same perceptions as to their employment effects on native-born workers in France and further disadvantaged by the suspicion that they may be exploiting the asylum system to their own benefit.

FIGURE 2: PERCEIVED ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IMMIGRANTS IN 2008, BY COUNTRY



Source: *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In*, OECD, based on data from the European Social Survey (2008), in Bordignon and Moriconi 2017, 8.

This perception continues to exist among both the French population and policy makers, despite strong evidence to the contrary, for a variety of reasons. Lucy Mayblin, analyzing the British case where the pull-factor theory was widely used in the early 2000s and resembles the French situation, argues that this theory was originally constructed as a convenient way to reduce the complexity of the asylum crisis and yet turned into a fact informing policy to this day. She also presents three reasons that explain why the right to work continued to wrongly be seen in Britain as a draw to asylum seekers:

First, because the simplified understanding of the issue, the policy imaginary, continued to be espoused. Second, because the institutional framework from which it emerged, which promoted a distinct separation between working and asylum, remained. Third, because the continued use of technologies to measure asylum applications showed that applications were decreasing (Mayblin 2016, 824-825).

These three reasons can be seen in France, since the government continues to defend its choice to not allow asylum seekers to work (since it is not a high priority need for “real refugees”) and applications decreased for five years after the 1991 removal of the right to work of asylum seekers.

France is now in a situation where it treats its asylum seekers as presumptive economic migrants, using the asylum system to be able to acquire a work permit to live in France and compete with French workers, and yet cannot expel them because of its responsibilities to protect refugees under international law and its own constitution. The result is disadvantageous to both parties: future refugees cannot work and are not integrated into French society, reducing their potential benefits to French society and their own welfare, while the French government spends millions of dollars supporting asylum seekers during their waiting period, fueling public resentment towards asylum seekers who appear lazy and deceitfully claiming benefits that they are not entitled to.

COMPARING FRANCE AND SWEDEN: KEY FACTORS EXPLAINING CONTRASTING POLICIES

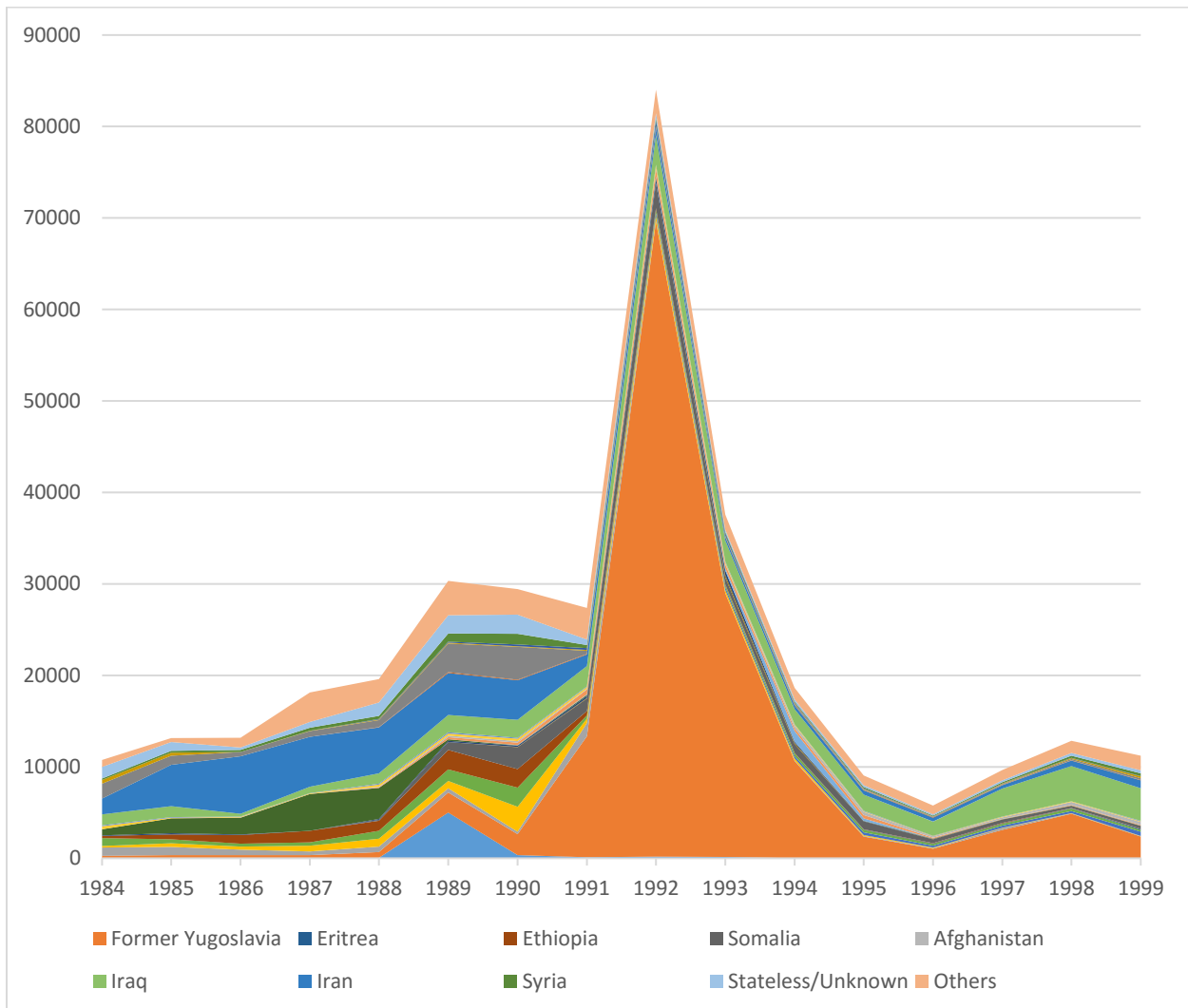
Unlike France, Sweden chose to open its labor market to asylum seekers and encourage them to work. In 1992, a year after France closed its labor market to asylum seekers, Sweden exempted the vast majority of asylum seekers from needing a work permit in order to secure employment in the country. As long as an asylum seeker is able to provide identity documents, the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) will provide them with an Asylum Seeker Card which allows them to work. However, even this small requirement is flexible, allowing those asylum seekers without identity documents to obtain authorization as long as they are “cooperative in the work of proving their identity” (Valenta and Thorshaug 2013, 467). In 1997, the Swedish government passed a bill (Prop. 1997/98:17) which officially transitioned the country from an immigrant policy to an integration policy. This new policy of integration emphasized “equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their ethnic and cultural background, social cohesion built on diversity and social development characterised by mutual respect within the boundaries of a democratic society, in which everyone should take an active and responsible part” (Wiesbrock 2011, 50). This is remarkable, since between the time Sweden exempted asylum seekers from the work permit requirement and 1997, the country had faced a severe economic downturn which raised the national unemployment rates from around 2% to 10% (Wiesbrock 2011, 60). Sweden recovered in the 2000s, but the French argument that unemployment is a reason to deny the right to work to asylum seekers clearly did not apply in Sweden, which instead increased its effort to integrate them. In 2009, the Swedish government passed another bill (Prop. 2009/10:60) which reformed the national integration policy to “speed up the introduction of newly arrived immigrants into working and social life by encouraging them to become actively employed” (Wiesbrock 2011, 50).

Since 1992, Sweden has become the prime example of a country that has allowed asylum seekers to work and made strong public commitments to integrating them onto the labor market. The integration policy espoused by Sweden in 1997 contributed to this willingness in Sweden to open up the labor market to asylum seekers. Not only are asylum seekers allowed to work, they are expected to work to sustain themselves as they await their decision and are invited to live with friends and relatives already in Sweden. If asylum seekers cannot find housing with friends or family, the Swedish Migration Agency will endeavor to find housing for them. Although the Swedish commitment to integrating immigrants may have played role, Hans E. Andersson and Susanna Nilson explain that policy makers in Sweden argued that the high cost of publicly funding the housing and living expenses of asylum seekers “created an interest in making asylum seekers self-financing” (2011, 174-5). Yet, while it has been cost-effective, this policy also allows asylum seekers to avoid gaps in their work experience that could negatively impact their employability and removes some barriers to them joining Swedish society, particularly if they know or are able to learn Swedish quickly. It could also help limit situations of asylum seeker abuse at work, as unlike in France, asylum seekers are legally permitted to work and are able to refuse working conditions underneath the national minimum standards without fear of losing their job. Finally, the Swedish Migration Agency also provides further financial support to asylum seekers based on need, as well as referrals to Swedish language classes .

Sweden’s policies on the labor market integration of asylum seekers could be surprising, since for a long time Sweden had not been an immigration-friendly country. Andersson and Nilsson write: “Since Sweden first regulated immigration in 1967, it has become exceptionally difficult to obtain permanent residency permission for labour market reasons. Excluding citizens from states within the European Economic Agreement, only 350 persons acquired permanent residency for work purposes in 2006” (2011, 174-5). Yet, Sweden has long endeavored to welcome and integrate asylum seekers and refugees. Some observers point to the pride Swedes have in their country’s socially progressive policies or their sense of guilt for having closed their doors to Jews fleeing the Nazis during the Second World War as reasons for the generosity of their asylum policies. Although is difficult to verify if these reasons had any real influence on Swedish asylum policy, it is clear that Sweden has today adopted a strategy of hosting refugees which is cost-effective and eliminates the waiting period faced by asylum seekers nearly everywhere else.

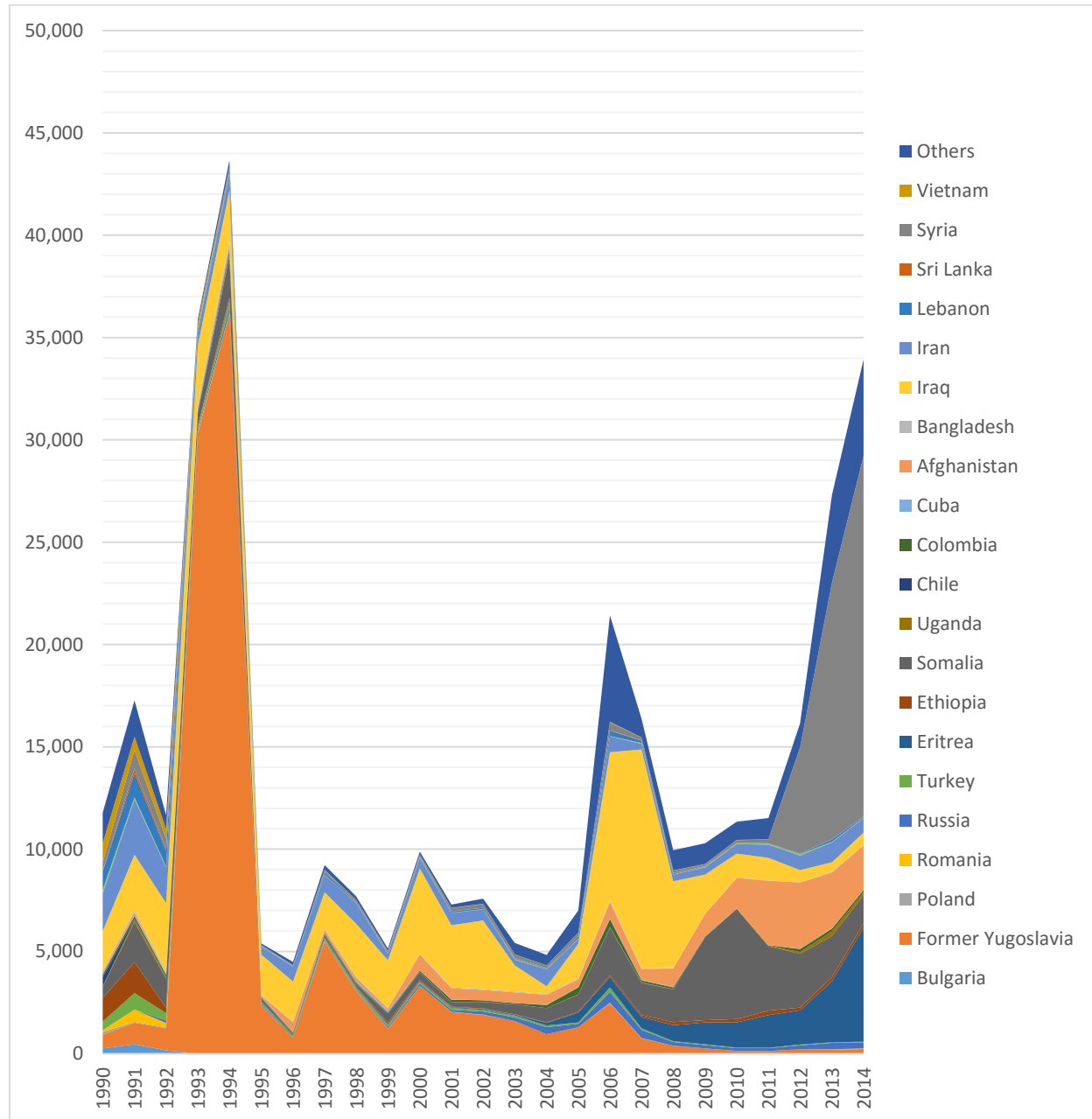
The root of the Swedish decision to exempt refugees from the labor market permit requirement more likely stems from the large increase in the number of asylum applications made in Sweden in 1992, driven mostly in part by the large increase of asylum applicants fleeing from former Yugoslavia (specifically Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro) after its collapse that same year and the beginning of a genocidal civil war. Instead of closing their borders to this large influx of asylum seekers, Sweden instead simplified the process by allowing asylum seekers to work and sustain themselves as a way of reducing the burden on the Swedish asylum system. The fact that these were European refugees, from a former socialist country, could have played a considerable role in influencing Sweden’s decision to allow asylum seekers to work while their claim is being evaluated. However, Sweden is no pinnacle of humanitarianism: like other countries in Europe, including France, Sweden implemented visa restrictions for people from certain countries who were seen as likely to request asylum on arrival in Sweden, including Bosnians, who were facing ethnic cleansing at the time (Human Rights Watch, 1996). While allowing asylum seekers to work is beneficial to the integration of future refugees in Sweden, it also serves the fiscal interests of the Swedish government by reducing the direct cost of supporting asylum seekers (providing housing, money, etc.) and processing their work permit applications.

FIGURE 3: APPLICATIONS FOR ASYLUM RECEIVED IN SWEDEN, 1984-1999



Source: Swedish Migration Agency. Graph by author.

FIGURE 4: RESIDENCE PERMITS GRANTED TO REFUGEES IN SWEDEN, 1980-2014

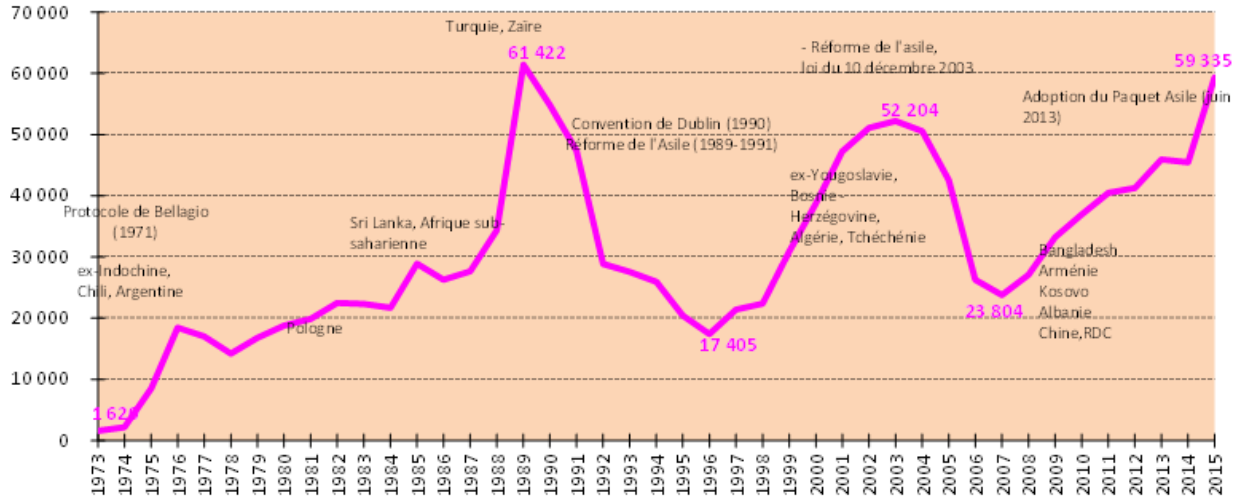


Source: Swedish Migration Agency. Graph by author. *Note: All residence permits granted to foreigners for reasons pursuant to the Geneva Convention, who are conscientious objectors, de-facto refugees, or persons in need of protection, and for humanitarian reasons.*

Meanwhile, France had different nationalities dominating the asylum applications it was receiving around 1990, which influenced its decision to discourage asylum applications by cancelling the right to work of asylum seekers in 1991. Like Sweden, France faced a large increase in the number of first time asylum applications around 1990, which increased by more than 30,000 applications a year between 1987 and 1989. However, instead of former Yugoslavians, the primary asylum claimants were from Turkey and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). In response to this influx of non-European asylum

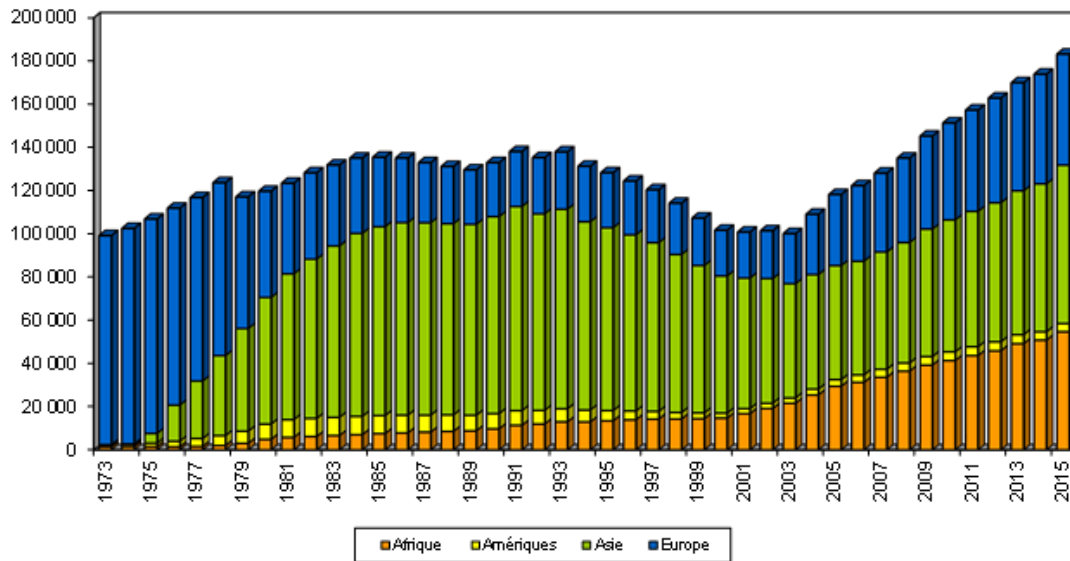
applications, France took the opposite stance of Sweden and changed its policies to make living in France more difficult for asylum applicants, hoping to discourage them from applying by instituting new administrative hurdles. A variety of other restrictive immigration policies were implemented as well, including fines against airlines that failed to prevent clandestine immigrants from landing in France and police-accompanied transit for people suspected of wanting to claim asylum during their transit in a French airport (Bousquet 2006, 5).

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN FRANCE FROM 1978-2015



Source: Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA). May 2, 2017.

A belief that Congolese and Turkish immigrants were less able to assimilate to French culture among French policy makers could have played a considerable role in this choice, helping to explain why France and Sweden took opposite paths. Unlike in Sweden, the geographic origin of asylum seekers in France since 1973 was also increasingly African or Asian and by the 1980s most asylum seekers originated from these two continents. This created an opportunity for opponents of non-European immigration to criticize the asylum system and the “benefits” available to asylum seekers. In discussing the intergration and dual nationality of immigrants in France, Patrick Simon points out that critics of allowing dual nationality for immigrants “focused on the lack of commitment to French national identity among second-generation North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans. Ethnic minorities were accused of fostering the “balkanization” of French society with their “communitarianism” and prompting the decline of social cohesion” (Simon 2012, 2). As such, one explanation for France’s restrictive policy is that majority non-European asylum seekers were seen as less culturally assimilable in France than Sweden’s European asylum seekers.

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN FRANCE ON DECEMBER 31ST SINCE 1973

Source: Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA). May 2, 2017. Note: graph does not include beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

In addition, France's asylum seekers were from far poorer countries, including Zaire and Turkey, than the former Yugoslavia. This prevalence of poverty in their country of origin provided fuel for the perception in France that the majority of asylum seekers from these countries were fleeing poverty rather than threats to their safety, and were abusing the asylum system to legally work in France. Even if asylum seekers had legitimate claims for asylum, the incentive to flee poverty could cast doubt on their whole application, contributing both to the high rates of OFPRA rejections and general suspicion of asylum seekers in France. Sweden, however, strong in its commitment to humanitarianism, faced a different demographic in its flow of asylum seekers which crafted its decision to open rather than restrict its labor market.

Another difference between France and Sweden was the strength of their respective far-right, anti-immigration parties. In 1988, French presidential election, the far-right National Front (FN) candidate won 14.4% of the national vote. That same year, Sweden's far-right nationalist party, Sweden Democrats, attracted barely more than 1,000 votes in the country's parliamentary elections. When France made its decision to close the labor market to asylum seekers, FN was already a significant anti-immigration party in France building a base among working-class people. In Sweden, there was no credible anti-immigrant or far-right party until 1991 with the lighting success of the populist New Democracy party which attracted only 6.7% of the vote and then failed to gain any seats in the following election. This is partly because Sweden had a history of strongly limiting immigration, save for asylum seekers and refugees, while France had a long history as a country of labor immigration. French policy makers feared that appearing soft on "fake refugees" might cause them to lose voters to the National Front, while Swedish policy makers did not have this fear since the far-right was firmly in the fringes of political life. This is changing today, as both the National Front and Sweden Democrats have made remarkable gains in the last few years, threatening both countries' political establishments. However, the differing political situation was certainly a factor allowing for Sweden to implement such a pro-integration policy for asylum seekers in 1992, and causing France to retract their right to work in 1991.

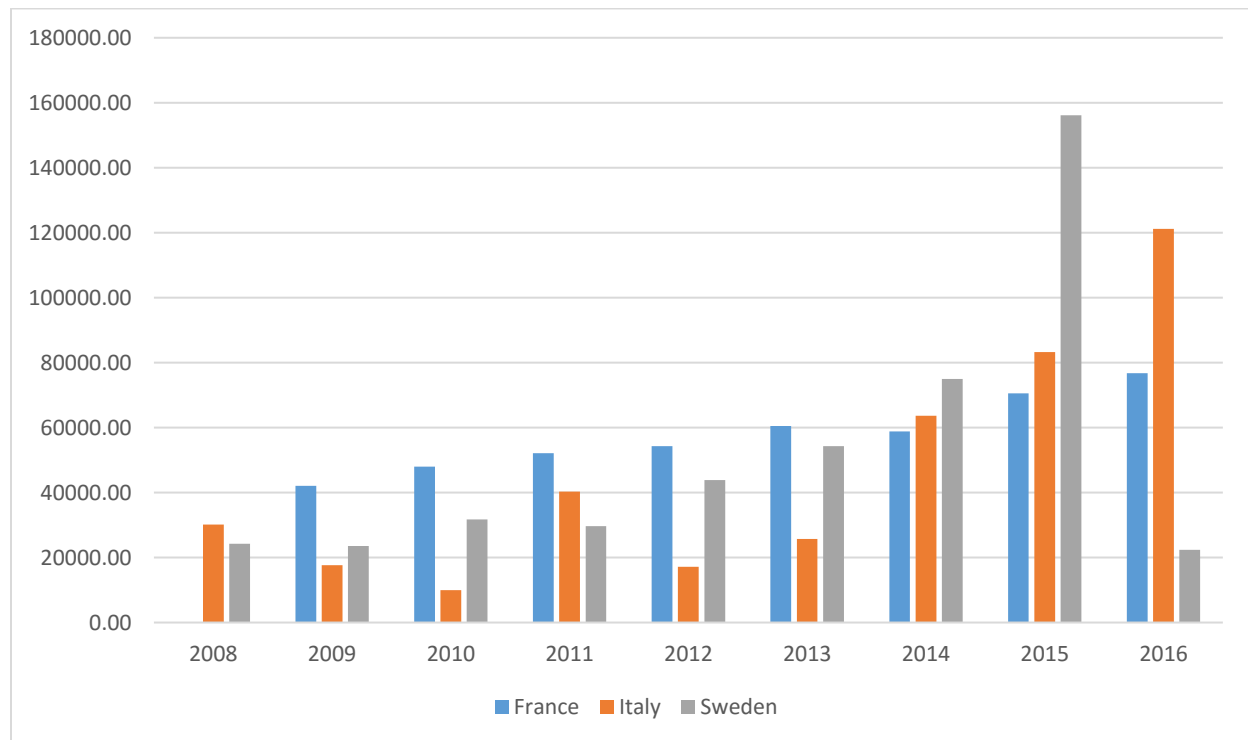
A final explanation for why France closed its labor market to asylum seekers while Sweden opened theirs is the different levels of institutionalized social partner involvement in the crafting of immigration

policy in France and in Sweden. While in France immigration policy was tightly controlled by the executive wing of the government and its ministries (Freeman 1979, 118), the Swedish social partners had a strong influence on immigration policies. The Swedish trade union confederation, LO, was particularly involved, and was in favor of “a heavy institutional apparatus around the issue of immigration, and to make it an integral part of social policy” (Rosenberg 1995, 213). While in France the limited debate over the immigration policy of the government led to a repressive immigration policy designed to deter asylum seekers, institutionalized contestation at the highest level in Sweden by LO led to an active immigration policy to integrate asylum seekers in recognition of the country’s moral obligations.

THE PATH AHEAD: INTEGRATING ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO THE FRENCH LABOR MARKET

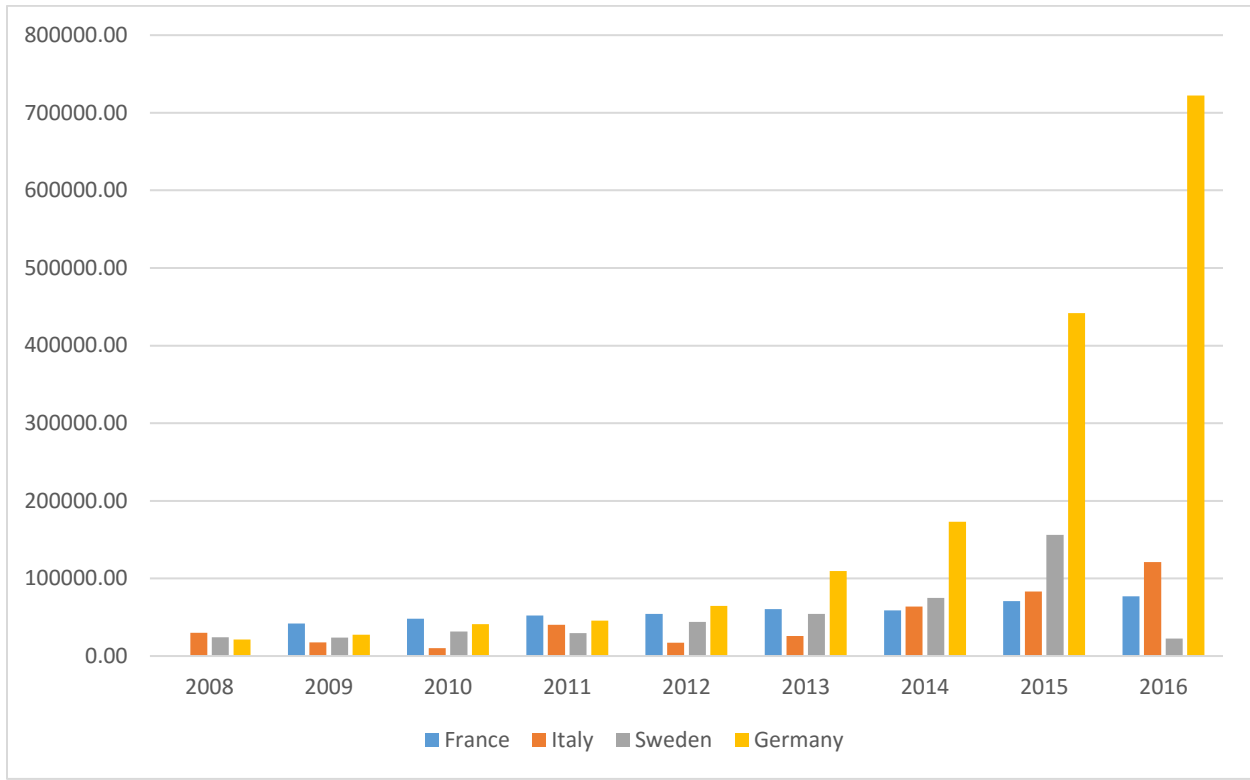
The increasing number of asylum seekers arriving in France and continuing to be rejected at high rates, yet in the vast majority of cases remaining illegally in the country, should lead France to consider reforming how it treats asylum seekers and integrates future refugees. This is especially important considering that it is hosting only a relatively small part of the asylum seekers arriving in the European Union. Compared to the rest of the European Union today, France’s asylum influx is quite modest. In 2012, Germany surpassed France as the primary recipient of first-time asylum applications in the European Union. In 2014, Sweden and Italy also surpassed France in 2014 (although Sweden has saw a sudden drop in first-time asylum applications in 2016). In terms of first-time asylum applications, France is today nowhere near bearing the brunt of asylum applications in the European Union. Even less so relative to its large population, with Sweden and Germany receiving a much larger ammount of first-time asylum applications relative to their populations. In a time of 10% unemployment, Sweden made the choice to switch from an immigration policy to an integration policy. Today, with an unemployment rate around 10 % and an increasing number of asylum seekers awaiting decisions and failed asylum seekers remaining in France illegally, France will also have to redefine its immigration and asylum policy to ensure that it is able to efficiently integrate these new arrivals into their communities, particularly through effective labor market integration.

FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN FRANCE, ITALY, AND SWEDEN, 2008-2016



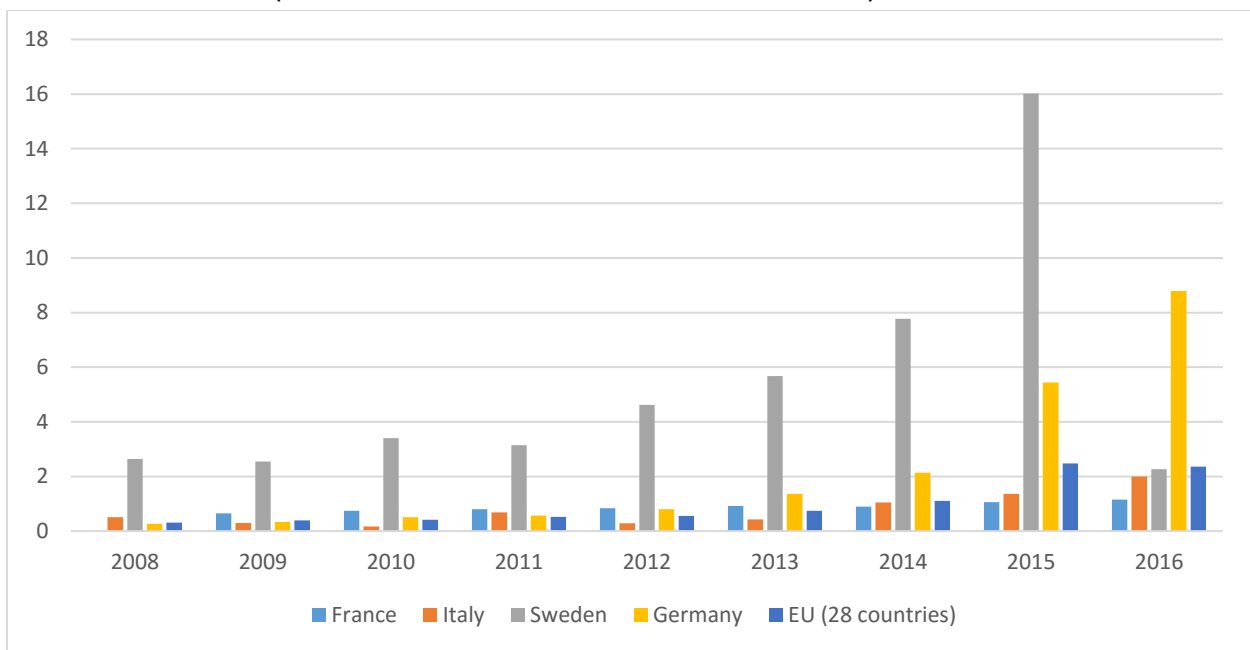
Source: Eurostat.

FIGURE 8: NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN FRANCE, ITALY, AND SWEDEN, 2008-2016 (INCL. GERMANY)



Source: Eurostat.

FIGURE 9: NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME ASYLUM APPLICATIONS PER 1000 PEOPLE IN FRANCE, ITALY, SWEDEN, AND THE EUROPEAN UNION (RELATIVE TO THE NATIONAL OR EU-28 POPULATION)



Source: Eurostat.

Yet, despite the critical importance of integrating refugees onto the labor market early on, this has so far not been a priority for the French government:

The refugee issue is addressed with a short-term approach and with a focus on the asylum procedure and on the reception of asylum seekers [...] The logic of political renewal, budgetary reforms as well as the wish for France not to become an attractive destination within the EU are further factors that may explain this stance (Martin et al. 2016a, 27).

In other words, the priority is placed on being able to provide temporary housing for asylum seekers, rather than setting the foundations for their long-term integration in France. The reasons advanced are highly debatable. According to Regina Konle-Seidl and Georg Bolits, “there is no clear evidence from research that migrants, including refugees, actively select destination countries where the welfare provisions are more favourable (‘welfare shopping’)” (2016, 32). Increasing the chances of quickly obtaining asylum or allowing asylum seekers to work legally would likely not increase the number of people seeking asylum in France. Even if it does, this policy change should not lead to a large increase in spending on the reception of asylum seekers if they can be more quickly transitioned into independent employment. France would also be able to redirect the funds it would have spent on refugee reception and redirect them to unemployment relief and skill retraining programs (including for asylum seekers). France may benefit in the long-term from an increasing number of young residents paying into France’s welfare system, a system which is unsustainable considering the current age demographic of the country.

Regardless of France’s fear that more humane policies may attract for asylum applications, the Calais ‘Jungle’ and other informal asylum seeker encampments in France are a testament to the fact that France cannot escape its responsibility to integrate asylum seekers. Strict controls on the right of asylum to work do not help refugees: they simply push asylum seekers into an informal existence in a country that will remain foreign to them. Unable to avail themselves of the right to legal minimum wages and terms of employment, they are more attractive to unscrupulous employers than native workers. Most labor unions have realized for a few decades now that government efforts to close borders to foreign workers have failed. Unless the government is willing to enforce the deportation of asylum seekers, putting the lives of genuine refugees at risk once forcibly returned to their origin countries, laws preventing them from living and working in France will fail. Considering this situation, France should create a legal pathway for both waiting asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers to live and work legally in France, since alternatively they will do so and have done so illegally. They in fact be encouraged to work and sustain themselves with active labor market policies tailored to their needs, fostering their integration in France through the key socializer of the labor market.

As argued in the previous sections, the best labor market integration programs for refugees involve a mix of classroom and on-the-job training and financial incentives for employers to hire them. Since many asylum seekers in France come from countries such as Syria and Iraq whose citizens have historically had high chances of receiving refugee status or subsidiary protection, the French government should target, at minimum, these likely future refugees for integration upon arrival to achieve the greatest results. Yet, considering the French government’s unwillingness to target asylum seekers for integration, pressure to change these policies must come from outside influencers, both within France and outside of France. The two sources that hold the most promise are the French social partners and the European Union.

In France, like elsewhere in Europe, the social partners have a large and even institutionalized influence over policy formulation on issues related to employment. They can exert pressure on governments to do more to integrate asylum seekers onto the labor market. They can also directly offer training and other services to asylum seekers. This is already the case in Sweden, where the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) informs asylum seekers, who are automatically allowed to work, about their rights and working in Sweden, and influences Swedish government policies (Karras and Morina 2016, 50-51).

Programs spearheaded by the social partners to integrate refugees onto the labor market have also been implemented in Germany, Italy, and Denmark, among others (Fric and Aumayr-Pintar 2016).

According to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), “French unions are unanimously declaring that France should welcome migrants [and] are also asking for a permanent revision of the Dublin III Regulation” (Fric and Aumayr-Pintar 2016). In addition to the humanitarian argument for welcoming asylum seekers, unions are interested in limiting the number of workers in the informal economy and expanding their memberships. Unions in France and elsewhere in Europe have come to realize since the 1980s that states could not control their borders and prevent foreign workers from competition with domestic workers. Efforts to do so only forced foreign workers to migrate illegally and work in the informal economy with lower wages and quality of employment (Watts 2002, 54-55). By making it illegal for asylum seekers to work and only giving them a small amount of money to live on, French asylum policy risks encouraging workers to enter the informal economy in the same way as irregular migrants, posing an even greater threat to the cost competitiveness of domestic workers and union members. This is part of the reason unions came out in force to support undocumented workers, including failed asylum seekers, in France during the ‘Sans-Papiers’ campaigns of 2008-2010 (Tapia, Turner, and Adler 2014). Just as it makes sense for unions to support moderate immigration policies that give a legal pathway for foreigners to work in the country, it makes sense for them to support asylum seekers in obtaining legal employment.

So far, efforts by French unions to help asylum seekers have focused on charity and human rights demonstrations, in addition to campaigns supporting undocumented workers (Eurofound 2016). However, they could potentially have a much larger impact on the integration and welfare of asylum seekers by influencing immigration policy at the national level, like LO did in Sweden, although the divisions between the French union confederations would have to be overcome for this to occur. More moderate union federations have often been used by the French government to counteract more radical unions in exchange for moderate concessions, weakening the trade union movement’s ability to craft progressive immigration policy. Together, the industry-level collective bargaining agreements signed by French labor unions 98% of employees in France, despite only 8% of employees in France being members of a union. French unions can certainly punch above their weight in the policy arena, if they can channel their strong influence on minimum wages and conditions of employment in France to asylum and immigration policy.

The main French employers’ association, MEDEF, is also pushing for a greater integration of refugees onto the labor market, stressing the need for a system to assess the skills and language level of refugees, although it has been less vocal about its position on the issue than the unions (Martin et al. 2016b, 63). Under the MEDEF, French employers are much more unified than unions in terms of their political outreach, but this is also a liability since the organization may fear losing some of its members if it took an activist political stance on behalf of asylum seekers.

The social partners, both unions and employers, can also play a role in sensitizing the public as to the value of policies designed to integrate asylum seekers and refugees onto the labor market, emphasizing the benefits outlined in the previous sections as well as those relevant to their specific constituencies. This is particularly important since governments across Europe, including in France, have been wary of being seen as too pro-immigrant and some have even shifted to the right on immigration issues to counteract the rise of far-right nationalist political parties. In France, union workers have been targeted by the far-right National Front (FN) as a source of potential voters, playing on their fear of wage competition with immigrant workers. This is particularly important since the fear of drawing support to FN has dissuaded French governments on both the left and the right from taking policy action which might make them appear too immigrant-friendly. Unions and employers’ associations can be influential voices for rallying their constituencies around progressive policies for asylum seeker labor market integration, and provide direct and indirect support to more moderate political parties intent on applying these policies.

As social partners demonstrate their support for these policies and take pro-active steps to integrate asylum seekers with a high likelihood of remaining, the European Union should also reform its Dublin III regulations and move towards creating a common asylum system. These regulations create an undue burden on border countries of the European Union to pay for the reception of asylum seekers, and incentivize countries like France to offer minimal services to asylum seekers in the hopes they will seek asylum elsewhere. This unfair distribution of the initial burden of receiving and integrating asylum seekers creates tensions between the EU member states, as demonstrated spectacularly by the United Kingdom's vote to leave to the EU. It also wastes the skills and economic potential of asylum seekers to contribute greatly to the economies of EU member states if integrated effectively onto their labor markets. While France's fear that implementing policies beneficial to asylum seekers will lead to a massive increase in the number of asylum seekers in France is largely unfounded, addressing this argument will eliminate a major basis for this policy. According to Ruben Andersson:

This ambitious shift needs to highlight the benefits of mutuality and the costs of 'going it alone'. The current lingo of 'burden sharing' must be replaced by more enabling language – and incentives to match it. Labour market instruments can be used to draw on the skills and ambitions of new arrivals, while EU funds can support vulnerable refugees as well as poorer member states (2016, 16).

France is nowhere near to dealing with same number of asylum seekers as border states like Italy, Austria, or Greece, or as Sweden and Germany who have largely ignored the Dublin III regulations to welcome more asylum seekers than required by the EU regulation. Under a common EU asylum system, France might be forced to take on more asylum seekers. However, the fear of uncontrolled asylum seeker migration could be abated by the normalization of pathways to refugee status across the European Union, with a more efficient matching of asylum seeker skills to local labor market needs. The European Union should not attempt to directly change French immigration policy, but it can play its role in assuage the country's fears.

CONCLUSION

Since 1991, France has followed a policy of preventing asylum seekers from working as they wait for their applications to be evaluated, to the detriment of both the country's finances and the wellbeing of future refugees. By preventing asylum seekers from working, the French government hoped to remove an incentive for "fake refugees" to seek asylum in France merely to work legally while their claim is being processed and to reduce the total number of applications for asylum. Yet, this regime has failed, as the number of first-time asylum applications has risen in 2015 to nearly the same number as the previous peak in 1989 and 96% of rejected asylum seekers stay in France illegally, outside the protection of the law, posing a greater threat of wage-competition to native-born workers bound by French labor laws. Asylum seekers are not dissuaded by restrictive border and labor market controls from coming to France, many having lived in lawlessness after fleeing countries with no effective rule of law. However, they live separated from local communities, either working clandestinely or being inactive for months, if not years, for a final decision to be made on their application. France pays for their housing and subsistence during this time, angering many native-born workers who see this as an unfair welfare benefit. The lucky minority that are recognized as refugees, after months of inactivity or clandestine work, are ill-prepared to enter the labor market and more likely to be a burden on public finances rather than an economic boon through their taxes, consumption, and entrepreneurship.

Multiple studies have proven the efficacy of labor market integration programs, particularly those combining classroom and on-the-job training, in improving the employment potential and social integration of refugees. They have also demonstrated that these are most effective in improving outcomes for refugees when they are applied early and allow them to enter the labor market quickly. In countries like France where the asylum application process is particularly long, programs should be implemented to integrate asylum

seekers onto the labor market as early as possible. Sweden is one country that has moved in this direction, offering near immediate labor market access to asylum seekers in 1992, and deepening its commitment to a policy of integration through the 1990s, despite experiencing high unemployment. French policy makers fear that allowing asylum seekers to work, and compete with local workers, may cause voters to support the nationalist Front National, especially in the current context of 10% unemployment. Yet, with similarly high levels of unemployment, Sweden defended and extended its asylum policy in a way that reduced the cost of hosting asylum seekers and increased their integration into local communities.

Multiple factors explain why France and Sweden made different choices, and help inform future actions to restore labor market access to asylum seekers. The main factors were the economic slowdown of the 1970s and the suspicion of asylum seekers as being largely “fake refugees,” supposedly drawn to France by the ability to legally work while waiting for a decision on their claim. Both Sweden and France saw a sharp rise in the number of asylum applications around 1990, although the asylum seekers in France mostly came from poorer African and Asian countries while asylum seekers in Sweden were almost entirely from former Yugoslavia. This fueled the idea in France that most asylum seekers were fleeing poverty and were not actual refugees, not to mention euro-centric concerns over assimilation and communitarianism in France, while the same concerns were much smaller for former Yugoslavs fleeing to Sweden. However, it is the institutional differences in how immigration policy is crafted in Sweden and France are the most interesting, since Sweden’s high-level cooperation with the social partners (particularly unions) on immigration policy produced an active labor market integration policy for asylum seekers while France’s executive-driven immigration policy-making mechanism produced a strategy of immigration deterrence.

Considering the positive role of the social partners in crafting a labor market integration policy which allows asylum seekers to enter the labor market quickly and provides a framework of programs to support them, French social partners should channel their efforts on influencing work on a new asylum policy. Both employers and unions have taken actions to support asylum seekers or refugees onto the labor market, and should actively lobby to reject restrictions on the right of asylum seekers to work. With the legitimacy provide by the backing of the social partners and other civil society organizations, an innovative French government may be able to allow asylum seekers to work and support them in a way that reduces the public cost of hosting them as it did in Sweden, improves the ability of asylum seekers to enter the labor market and so integrate into French society, and limits the backlash from French workers who would otherwise support the National Front.

With concerns over unemployment and immigration in France fueling political parties on both the far-right and far-left in France, the French political establishment will need to abandon its failed restrictive immigration policies for asylum seekers and adjust to the inevitable inflow of asylum seekers by presenting an integration program that maximizes their potential impact on France’s economy and society. If France does not transform its asylum policies, particularly regarding their labor market integration, then the far-right narrative of unemployed and isolated asylum seekers, more likely to commit crimes or to lash out in acts of terrorism, will likely become a reality. Progressive immigration reform that allows asylum seekers to work and integrate effectively through the labor market has worked in Sweden and other European countries. Given political will and involvement from the social partners and civil society in demanding reform, a policy which actively integrates asylum seekers and refugees could also work in France.

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