MAPPING GERMANY’S SUITABILITY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, more than a million asylum seekers have entered Germany, sparking an intense debate over the economic and social ramifications of the influx. Defenders of Germany’s liberal refugee policy say the asylum seekers could provide an economic boost to an aging country, while opponents argue that they will displace native Germans from the labor force or form immigrant-majority enclaves isolated from mainstream German society.

This debate motivates the following two spatial questions: Where are the most suitable areas of Germany for incoming asylum seekers to be settled? Do asylum seekers already in Germany tend to live in economically vibrant areas that offer the prospect of social integration?

METHODOLOGY
Germany’s 402 landkreise (districts) were assigned scores from 1 to 5 based on the following six factors: unemployment rates; average household income; density of train stations (a proxy for ease of transportation and job market accessibility); support for Alternative for Germany (AfD), the country’s most prominent anti-immigration political party; the rate of violent attacks on asylum seekers; and, the percentage of residents who are not German citizens.

Districts with a moderate non-German population are assigned higher scores on this last metric, as living in areas that have neither a very large nor very small share of foreign residents likely facilitates the integration process. Support for AfD was measured based on the results of state-level elections held since 2015, and on polling data for Germany’s upcoming federal election. The small maps of Germany below show districts’ scores for many of these metrics.

Scores for each of these six factors were then weighted and recalibrated to obtain an overall suitability score from 0 to 100 for each district, with higher scores indicating greater suitability. Districts’ scores are displayed in the large map to the right. The weightings are as follows: unemployment (25%), income (20%), support for AfD (15%), size of foreign-born population (15%), rate of attacks on asylum seekers (15%), and density of train stations (10%).

These suitability scores may be problematic as a prescriptive policymaking tool, because they do not include cost considerations (which may make “less suitable” areas more practical to house asylum seekers), and could create perverse political incentives. However, it is hoped that the scores illuminate the factors facilitating successful integration, and that they could be useful to asylum seekers themselves as well.

SOURCES

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