The impact of narratives on policy-making at the national level

The case of Germany

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Reviewers

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Abstract

This report investigates the evolving landscape of migration narratives in Germany, focusing on three pivotal events: the 'migration crisis' of 2015, the humanitarian catastrophe at the refugee camp 'Moria' in 2020, and the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees in 2022. Employing a multi-dimensional approach, the research scrutinizes narratives across media, political debate, and policy-making in terms of their key elements (characters, setting, plot and moral) as well as their style (lay vs. technocratic). Analysis of the textual data from these spheres is supplemented by insights gained through expert interviews with civil servants working in migration-related areas.

Against the backdrop of Germany's history of migration and migration policy, the report notes changing patterns in German public attitudes towards migration, characterized by shifts from positive perceptions tied to economic needs, to negative sentiments during the 2015 crisis, and a subsequent return to a more welcoming, economics-linked attitude in 2022, which is now challenged by a resurgent far-right opposition. Notably, these shifts in public sentiment are not consistently mirrored in media narratives, which have maintained positive narratives, casting migrants as victims and Germany as a hero. The research identifies nuanced differences in narrative framing across the case studies, especially concerning the portrayal of villains and the depth of analysis of root causes.

Furthermore, the study delves into whether and how media narratives are embraced, adapted, ignored or rejected in political debates and policy-making. While political debates largely embrace media narratives, even retaining their lay style, policy-making exhibits a more varying relationship. The coordinative sphere shows a convergence with media narratives in certain cases, such as the 'migration crisis' of 2015, but also reveals divergence, particularly in the case of 'Moria' in 2020.

On a broader level, our research identifies variations in consensus and controversy between the communicative and coordinative spheres, with the 2015 and 2020 case studies demonstrating differing patterns. Additionally, the study highlights the distinct approaches of opposition and government parties in the coordinative sphere, emphasizing how opposition parties often extend lay-style narratives from the communicative sphere into policy-making.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into the complex interplay of public sentiment, media discourse, political dynamics, and policy formulation in the context of migration narratives in Germany. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships between these spheres and how narratives might impact policy-makings processes in specific contexts.

Keywords: migration narratives, politics, policymaking, refugee crisis, Ukraine, Moria

1. Introduction

Migration is a salient issue in public opinion, media, political debate and policy-making across Europe, and yet the migration-related narratives in these fields often differ, in both style and substance. And while it is frequently the same events that are discussed across Europe, the way they are narrativised also differs between the national contexts. The way such narratives travel between media and political debate (the communicative sphere) (Schmidt 2008) and, in turn, between the communicative sphere and policy-making (the coordinative sphere), seems to depend not only on the events themselves but also on the national context – understood in terms of the country's history of migration and migration policies, pre-existing 'master narratives' about migration, and the political landscape (parties in government and opposition, political institutions).

This report presents a comparative analysis of narratives on migration in German media as well as the communicative and coordinative sphere of German politics, specifically the relationship between these spheres in terms of the embracing, adapting, rejecting and ignoring of narratives along their four components (setting, characters, plot and moral) and their style ('lay' vs 'technocratic'; for further details, see Boswell and Smellie 2023). This comparison is grounded in a historical overview of the German national context in terms of key narratives on migration, a review of its migration politics and policy developments since 2012, and public attitudes towards migration. The comparative analysis follows three case studies focused on specific migration-related events: the European migration crisis of 2015, the Ukrainian refugee crisis of 2022, and the humanitarian crisis on Lesbos following the fire destroying the Moria camp in 2020.

2. Background and national context

2.1 Key narratives on migration

Due to the long-lasting prevalence of a narrative of Germany as a non-immigration country, no comprehensive national migration policy was formulated up till the 2000s. In reality, throughout its history Germany has been a typical immigration country, especially actively recruiting foreign nationals for labour purposes. German (migration) history is marked by a continuing system of foreign labour employment. The focus of foreign labour employment goes back to the Prussian era, shifting from agriculture to the industrial sector in the mid-20th century.

In post-war West Germany, a large share of the labour force demand could be met by returning German prisoners of war (4 mil. until the end of 1950), refugees of German descent from Central Europe (approx. 4.7 mil.) and by persons emigrating from the German Democratic Republic (approx. 1.8 mil. until 1961) (Bade 1987: 60). In 1950, these migrants amounted to 16.7 per cent of the West German population, increasing to 23.9 per cent in 1960 (Herbert 1990: 196).

Although these immigrants were treated like Germans by law, and considered themselves as being Germans, their integration was fraught with conflicts: the autochthonous population often

showed open hostility towards these 'Flüchtlinge' (refugees) and raised concerns about their different culture, prejudices about their unwillingness to work, and their uncleanliness as well as their assumed tendency to criminality (Oberpenning 1999: 302; Schulze 1997: 53-72). Enjoying full citizenship rights and political participation facilitated the full integration of these migrants.

Even if the labour force demand of the Wirtschaftswunder, the booming German economy of the 1950s, could be met by these migrants of ethnic German origin, regional labour force demands emerged in specific sectors. These labour shortages led to the employment of first Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Moroccan, Portuguese, Tunisian and Yugoslavian 'guest workers' in the 1950s and 60s (Steinert 1995). For a significant period, the 'guest worker' narrative became the hegemonic narrative about what was in effect migration, but denied migration by claiming these were guests and would inevitably leave Germany again. The earnestness with which actual policy treated this form of labour-market migration can be seen in the full integration of these migrants into the German social security system as of 1955.

As a consequence of the world economic crises of the 1970s a halt on recruitment, which had already been under consideration since the late 60s due to concerns of social integration, was imposed. But in contrast to the prevailing narratives in political and public discourse, there was no enforcement of the regulation. Instead, the halt on recruitment was repeatedly punctuated by exceptions in subsequent years, but this did not lead to a change in the hegemonic 'guest worker' narrative about 'good migration'. Since the migrants were employed in unattractive sectors of the industry (mining, construction, metal and textile industry), German employers were interested in keeping their trained labourers. During the early 1970s it became increasingly obvious that the rotation strategy was not feasible, while at the same time the share of non-European migrants and their visibility in public increased.

During the Cold War, migration from Eastern European Countries into West Germany – especially from the GDR – was met with suspicion and subject to scrutiny from an array of Anglo-American and West German security services (Allen 2017: 3). While screening programmes were implemented to identify spies, those who were recognised as refugees also presented a propagandistic opportunity to present 'the West' as superior, with significant portions of the 'eastern population' wanting to escape deplorable conditions in the East (Allen 2017: 125; 233). This opportunity was often exploited in the form of a recurring narrative about oppressed but brave and freedom-loving East Germans not simply migrating but fleeing the GDR (Carruthers 2005).

Taken together, the need for foreign labour, the denial of this economic-demographic fact on the official level, and the obvious bypassing of the official regime, illustrates a structural pattern of migration policy-making in Germany: the reluctance to formulate policy on a national level. Indeed, locally the situation was often different, as the developments and needs in local situations which put pressure on local government and associations for innovative concepts and independent strategies able to tackle specific labour-market and migration-related challenges. In summary, the national paradigm on the narrative level runs counter to the pragmatic migration policies adopted especially at local levels.

Family reunion became the only possibility for regular immigration into Germany until the 90s. The ambiguous policy to stop new recruitment, to promote voluntary return and to integrate

socially those who were unlikely to return was obscured by narratives about the 'guest worker' and 'protecting the German labour market' (Heckmann 1994: 161; Hüttmann 2017). On the discursive level, these developments were accompanied by a prevailing ethnonationalist narrative about Germany, the German people and migration – the unfinished but far-reaching project of German reunification not only saw intra-national labour migration but also the rise of new xenophobic movements, especially in the former GDR (Joppke 1999: 62-99; Kolb 2015). The prevalence and, indeed, political utility of the 'guest worker' narrative in framing continued migration into Germany must be seen both in light of the specific nation re-building at the time (Green 2001) and of the general dynamics of ethnonationalism that make migration the primary source of 'disturbance' for the congruencies of an ethnically understood nation-state (Brubaker 2010: 68-70). Significantly, West Germany's concurrent asylum policy took a decidedly accommodating approach, constitutionally embedded and discursively linked to historical responsibility, that was maintained in unified Germany.

After the fall of the Berlin wall, German reunification, and with the civil war in Yugoslavia came several significant waves of migration. Firstly, naturalization was eased for long-time residents, the 1999 reform changing from *ius sanguinis* to *ius domicilii* (Joppke 1999: 200-202). For the first time in the history of German migration policy, these amendments introduced elements of the citizenship regulations of 'classical' countries of immigration. Naturalization was understood by the government as a 'final step of a successful integration process', a narrative maintained by the conservative mainstream until today. This followed a wider European trend to curtail state discretion (in Germany, naturalisation was granted only in the case of 'public interest') in citizenship acquisition and adopting a test- or merit-based administrative routine (Joppke 2010: 46). This trend has been linked to a more "porous" and less "discriminator" understanding of citizenship in the era of globalisation (Joppke 2010: vii). Secondly, the general stop to labour-market migration through recruitment was given major exceptions – allowing contract labourers and seasonal workers within quotas set annually by the government. This policy and the narrative of its necessity as 'demand-driven immigration' was contested by German labour unions.

Beyond labour migrants, the 1990s in Germany were dominated by heated political-public debates over asylum and asylum abuse. In 1992, asylum numbers were at a record high and designated living quarters were overflowing, with many additional migrants leading a de-facto homeless existence in public places. Fears of social unrest and crime were mounting, stoked not least by right-wing political factions, alleging widespread asylum abuse and the 'unworthiness' of such migrants. Two interlinked narratives – of migrants being culturally or ethnically predisposed to become criminals and of asylum seekers lying, cheating and using every bureaucratic trick possible to avoid deportation or prolong asylum procedures (#). Facing increasing political pressure from local communities that were responsible for providing for incoming asylum seekers and with a view to comply with the 'London regulations' of 1992 at the EU level, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1992 agreed to a compromise for an amendment of article 16a of the German Basic Law. The so-called Asylum Compromise – a compromise between the coalition government parties, which held ideologically opposed views – was a pivotal change insofar as the right to asylum became restricted by the 'safe third country' rule (Bosswick 1997: 67). Prior to this change, since its inception in 1949, Article 16 of Germany's Basic Law had extended the right to asylum to all politically persecuted persons, irrespective of place of entry or origin – an exceptionally open asylum policy informed by the experiences of German refugees during and after World War II. Since legal access to the

German asylum procedure was possible only via an airport, the vast majority of the 811,000 asylum seekers between 1993 and the end of 1999 entered illegally and hid their entry path, thus leaving the safe third country rule of the amendment quite ineffective (illegal entry followed by an immediate asylum application was not persecuted). The ineffective policy only fuelled the narratives of 'bogus asylum' seekers and asylum abuse, i.e., refugees exploiting the German welfare state.

The 2000s brought significant changes to Germany's migration policy and related narratives. In line with a profound turn in German discourse from restriction towards a connotation of immigration as an important resource in global competition, the German government installed an independent commission on immigration for proposal development. The commission comprised politicians, representatives of important institutions and civil society (including churches, unions, industry associations) and scientific experts (Zuwanderungskommission 2001). The commission concluded that immigration had become a necessity for economic as well as demographic reasons, and recommended the introduction of a point system similar to the Canadian model. The commission's recommendations were welcomed by the SPD, FDP and the Greens, as well as the UNHCR, churches, employers, unions, foreigners' councils and representatives of migrant groups. The two main conservative parties, CDU and CSU, however, rejected the proposals, criticising them as extending rather than limiting immigration. This marks the emergence of, or at least increase of, a significant split, in the political discourse about the role of migration in Germany – on the one hand, narratives about migration as an economic or demographic necessity that would benefit Germany and its people; on the other hand, narratives about migration as an economic burden and threat to social stability and cultural or ethnic congruency (Heckmann 2005).

A proposed law, which only included some of the commission's suggestions to begin with, failed due to a political stalemate during negotiations. It was not until 2004 that a compromise was reached. This was the last major reform of immigration before the time period covered by BRIDGES and the Integration Law of 2016 (see Work Package 3). The 2004 reform focused on labour and the economy. For instance, the law offers the option of permanent residency for highly qualified migrants if they invest at least €1 million and create at least ten jobs. The ban on the recruitment of unqualified labour and persons with low qualifications was maintained, with the exemption of individual cases in which their employment was regarded as in the public interest.

With regard to asylum, the humanitarian aspect was foregrounded and the new legal situation complied with the EU asylum directive regarding non-state and gender-specific persecution.

Regarding integration, a course system was implemented, granting all migrants access to such courses but making it mandatory for some, such as long-term residents receiving welfare payments, or migrants classified by the authorities as 'in special need of integration'. This indicates a response to the hegemonic narrative of 'integration refusers' or migrants 'unwilling to integrate' as well as 'exploiting' the German welfare state and the possibility of penalizing those failing to integrate (e.g. reducing welfare payments) (Steinert 2014).

TABLE 1: Historical overview of key events relevant to immigration narratives

1965	Foreigners' law passed
1973	'Anwerbestopp': halt on recruitment for non-EEC-nationals
1978	German parliament approved establishment of the 'Commissioner for the Promotion of Integration of Foreign Employees and their Families', affiliated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 1983 Law for the promotion of foreigners' repatriation, political mobilization against 'abuse of the right to asylum'
1990	New foreigners' law, replacing the 1965 regulations
1990	'Anwerbestoppausnahmeverordnung': decree on exceptions from the halt on recruitment, escalation of the dispute upon asylum and the constitutional article 16 (right to asylum for political refugees)
1992	So-called 'asylum compromise': amendment of article 16 of the German basic law, restricting the right to asylum by the safe third country rule; amendment to the German citizenship law (introducing a limited *ius domicilii*)
1997	Amendment to the foreigners' law: Increasing the visa-requirements for foreign unaccompanied children
2000	Independent Commission on Immigration (important representatives of NGOs, churches, and businesses), recommending the introduction of a point system similar to the Canadian model in its final report in 2001; introduction of *ius soli*
2001	Proposal for an immigration and foreigners' law by Minister of the Interior, resulting in a prolonged political conflict between the conservative opposition and the government, supported by most civil society and trade associations
2005	New foreigners' law, combining regulations for immigration, labour market access, the stay of foreigners and the integration of resident migrants to an integrated legislative concept for the first time
2007	New foreigners' law introduced
2015	Germany keeps borders open to migrants
2016	New integration law introduced in response to mass migration in 2015

Source: Own elaboration

The 2015 refugee crisis led to the emergence and intensification of several narratives related to asylum seekers and refugees in public and political discourse. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was largely successful in making the humanitarian/solidarity-based narrative, of helping refugees by allowing entry, the prevalent hegemonic narrative – a return, one might argue, to

a view of the 'universal right to asylum' as it had existed in the German Basic Law until the early 1990s, voiding the 'safe third country' rule. In the sphere of mainstream media, this has held true until today. In the political sphere, there has been more backlash, with the emergence of first the Pegida protest movement and then the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) as a political party. While the party has not been able to maintain the level of electoral success it had initially, especially in some parts of Germany, AfD became and remains a political force that is strongly anti-migration (and, specifically, anti-refugee or anti-asylum). Inasmuch as the far-right populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* owes its founding and electoral success to its anti-migration narratives, the latter have evidently had a significant and lasting impact on the entire political landscape of Germany, including the national and federal states' respective party systems.

Narratives propagated by these counter-movements depict migrants as potential terrorists and criminals, linking them to criminal trafficking and smuggling rings. Political discourse on the so-called refugee crisis also brought to the fore narratives about "deserving" and "underserving" migrants/refugees. This included the notion of the 'genuine refugee' as opposed to the 'economic refugee' (Wirtschaftsflüchtling), the latter replacing other notions of 'bogus' or 'fake' refugees (Scheinasylant) that had come before to describe those who, allegedly, applied for protection upon arrival in the country and try to take advantage of liberal asylum policies.

Finally, the so-called refugee crisis sparked political debate on Germany's role within Europe/the EU. Opposing narratives revolve around Germany's moral leadership and responsibility, interconnecting with long-standing hegemonic narratives about German/European/Christian values (Reiners/Tekin 2020), and the securitisation of migration/demonisation of irregular migrants (Vollmer 2017). The German political context of migration policy was substantially changed by the 2015 migration movements and subsequent events. The continuing absence of clear EU/European migration and asylum policy has slowly led to the questioning of Merkel's doctrine of humanitarian solidarity and open borders, coupled with the positive attitude epitomised in her "Wir schaffen das". Debates have come to focus, on the one hand, on Germany's role in Europe (leadership, shouldering a burden) and values; on the other hand, economic and labour market considerations remain a strong undercurrent in political discourse and policy-making regarding non-refugee immigration and integration. As yet, these debates have not led to a reversal or significant shift in Germany's policies.

2.2 Politics and policy developments 2012-2022

Focusing on the 10-year period between 2012 and 2022, we identify key political events, salient debates and policy/legal developments that, while heightened and/or accelerated by the migration crisis of 2015, present a wider trajectory.

In 2012, the Advisory Board of the German government's Integration Commissioner (Beirat der Integrationsbeauftragten) published a report outlining key aspects of current and future migration policy as well as relevant judicial decisions in Germany and at the European Court of Justice (Bundesregierung 2014). It emphasised the importance of language competence as a requirement and the need for education and labour market access for the successful integration of migrants – very much in line with then-current policy. Beyond this, the document included clear recommendations regarding migrants living in Germany, especially asylum

seekers and persons without residency status, to safeguard their human rights, specifically access to healthcare and social care, that were found lacking. The report also highlighted the importance of local integration initiatives beyond the legal framework. In summary, the report constitutes a detailed presentation and justification of migration policy at the time: an "obligation and rights" framework presented under the banner of "migration as an opportunity" for Germany, largely in terms of economic and demographic aspects. Policies regarding refugees and irregular migrants are framed as humanitarian and human rights questions.

In the same year, Germany's Federal Constitutional Court ruled that political expediency or strategizing must not lead to curtailing or relativising of human dignity and basic human rights. The legal issue in question involved the often-voiced suggestion to reduce welfare for asylum seekers and refugees to a minimum in order to deter migrants or because of their purportedly short stay. This far-reaching ruling was significant in that explicitly addressed the political debate and policy-making rather than existing policy (Bundesverfassungsgericht 2012). As the constitutional court has powers beyond judicial review that allow it to act or intervene of its own accord in matters pertaining the German Basic Law, including human rights, it is considered an additional source of law beyond the administrative branch of government.

In 2014, a study conducted at the University of Bremen estimated that up to 520,000 persons without residency status were living in Germany (Vogel 2014). This fuelled public and political debates about border control and stricter immigration regimes, feeding also into the debate about EU-level redistribution quotas.

In the course of 2015, in the context of the so-called refugee crisis, policy debates in Germany focused on two aspects: expediting/accelerating asylum procedures to quickly reduce the number of applicants awaiting a decision in Germany; administrative handling of arrivals (accommodation, welfare etc.), budgeting and local responsibilities. This marked a shift from integration to arrival and bureaucratic procedure. Beyond national policy, political debates also focused on the need for a European solution in the form of redistribution quotas. This happened on three levels: first, within the German political sphere, all political actors called for European solidarity in light of the large – often called 'disproportionate' – number of arrivals in Germany; second, within EU institutions, German representatives led the debate and pushed for concrete quota proposals; third, once an EU policy was formulated in May 2015, the Germany government endorsed and supported it. After this proposal was blocked by some member states, the German government decided to suspend the Dublin Regulation and allow asylum applications despite not being the country of first entry. The legality of this suspension was the subject of political and public debate within Germany, with the government essentially arguing that the Dublin system had collapsed or proven ineffective.

The results of the general elections in 2018 forced coalition negotiations between the conservative CDU/CSU and social-democratic SPD, in which migration policy, specifically refugee policy, was the most contested subject. While the former insisted on a strict limit of 180,000 to 220,000 immigrants, including refugees, the latter regarded any definitive numerical limit as anathema to a number of human rights, including the right to asylum. Ultimately, the resulting coalition agreement did include this numerical limit of total immigrants, a limit of 1,000 for family reunions (Bundesregierung 2018).

The year 2018 also saw the publication of a significant report by the UN Economic and Social Council regarding the situation of migrants in Germany. It expressed concerns that German residency law, by requiring public authorities to report undocumented migrants to immigration authorities, can deter individuals from seeking services, such as health care, that are essential for the enjoyment of their rights, and from reporting crimes, including domestic violence and sexual and gender-based violence (ECOSOC 2018). Its recommendations were reflected in the Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular Migration, to which Germany was party, insofar as the compact assures migrants safe access to basic services irrespective of their status or lack thereof. In 2019, these assurances – which remain unimplemented to date – are undermined by extending the purview of the Customs Office to discover 'abuse' of the German welfare system. The coalition agreement of the government elected in 2021 declared several migration-related aims, including a reworking of the above-mentioned reporting obligation so as to allow irregular migrants access to healthcare. The government's 2021 Migration Report concluded that this change as well as other migration-related aims have so far been blocked by 'security-related concerns' and continue to be the subject of debate (BAMF 2021).

2.3 Public attitudes: salience and public opinion data

Migration being a prominent and potentially election-deciding issue in Germany, there is no shortage of surveys and polls that aim to capture public attitudes toward migration in general, to specific groups of migrants (e.g., refugees or labour migrants, specific nationalities or religious groups). While their methodologies and specific questionnaires differ, sources, including Eurobarometer and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, combine to provide a nuanced and consistent picture of public attitudes.

In summary, studies show a clear change over the past decade in the public's view of and attitude towards migration as well as migration policy. In 2010, the most salient topic was Germany's efforts to attract foreign skilled workers, but from 2015 onwards, this shifted to Germany's willingness or moral obligation to accept refugees. In 2022, the impressions of the so-called "refugee crisis" were fading more and more, and the German public was once again looking at the topic of migration through the lens of labour and social participation or "integration", with notable aspects being cultural, religious and linguistic diversity/assimilation (Eurobarometer 2018, 2022; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022). This apparent cycle of attitudes suggests several observations: that we find in Germany a persistent, underlying attitude and corresponding narratives about labour migration; that this persistent frame may have been not replaced but merely displaced or overshadowed for a period; that a return to the persistent frame was perhaps not inevitable but likely, given the resilience of hegemonic discourse; and that, finally, this cycle is not trivial but accompanied but significant disruptions of the political landscape.

The German public's attitude has been characterised as founded on a general openness and acceptance towards migrants on an individual, institutional and societal level, with scepticism towards specific groups (Heckmann 2012). However, a growing minority of people and political movements are now advocating for a closed-border policy. With respect to the timeframe in question, the following developments are noteworthy: At the end of 2012, the German public was still used to the low net migration of the preceding years - which had even slipped into negative territory in 2008 - and the demographic calculations that suggested greater immigration was expected: The EU Blue Card for highly qualified third-country nationals had

been introduced and the recruitment ban of the 1970s was finally over. In this context, the term "welcome culture" emerged as an indicator of the country's openness and attractiveness for skilled workers who were needed (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012a).

At the beginning of 2015, the influx of asylum seekers was not yet an issue, although the number of asylum seekers from the Balkan states had already risen sharply since 2014 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015). In 2017, public attitudes showed clear ambivalence to what Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble called the "rendezvous with globalisation." The strong influx of refugees and its consequences was seen as a stress test for the country and its population, influencing attitudes towards migration as a whole (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017). Immigration to Germany from outside the EU was seen as a growing problem around 2017, with only a slight majority regarding integration as successful (Eurobarometer 2017). Since this was the first survey in this series carried out after early 2015, it was the first survey that would have been able to observe any effects of the 'migration crisis' on public attitudes. In 2019, what political actors referred to as the German "integration machine" had kicked into gear, refugees were now part of the new reality of German everyday life, and other issues were claiming greater public attention (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2019). Eurobarometer data from 2012 to 2022 clearly shows that the perception of immigration as an "issue" faced by Germany was initially low in the time period (8%), spiked around 2015 (76%), and has now abated again (back to 8%) (Eurobarometer 2022).

FIGURE 1: Immigration as most important issues facing the EU (Eurobarometer 2022)
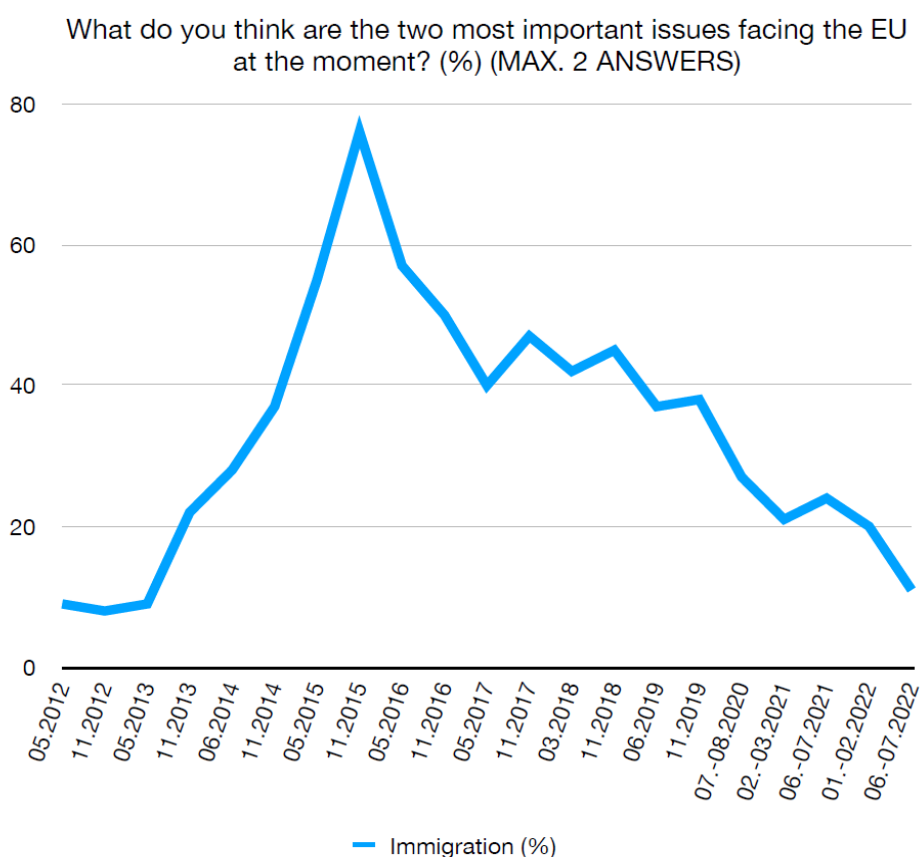
Source: Own elaboration

Since 2019, there has been a decline in migration scepticism, even if critical views and rejection continue to be present and perceptible in the population. This does not mean a simple return to the old normality of before the so-called "refugee crisis", but rather acceptance of a new normality in the perception of migration. There are various reasons for this, but central is likely to be the transformative impact of the Covid19 pandemic and the associated social restrictions. This state of emergency, unlike the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015, is not directly related to migration and has affected (or is affecting) the entire population, regardless of their origin or residence status. Perceived and actual immigration has decreased due to global travel restrictions. On the one hand, the pandemic has made it abundantly clear that without migrants neither the service sector nor the health sector in Germany can function. On the other hand, migration/integration as a social issue has been pushed into the background by the emergence of the steadily radicalising right-wing movements, a loose alliance of anti-vaccine protesters, conspiracy theorists, etc. (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022).

Scepticism towards migration remains more pronounced in eastern Germany than in the west. The younger the respondents are and the higher their level of education, the more open they are to immigration (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2021). The less respondents come in contact with migrants in their daily lives, the more negative their attitudes towards migrants (SVR Migration 2018).

Interestingly, in the 2022 survey study "Willkommenskultur zwischen Stabilität und Aufbruch", the clearest majority on any migration-related issue was the view that migration is crucial to the German economy (68%), closely followed by the view that it causes increased burdens on the German social welfare system (67%) and tensions between autochthonous and migrant populations (66%). While the German public's attitudes toward migration are similar to the EU average across most aspects, several key aspects diverge: immigrants are seen as enriching cultural life more frequently in Germany than in the EU average (68 over 61%), as a burden on the welfare system (71 over 56%), as worsening crime (64 over 55%); at the same time, immigrants are seen less frequently as taking jobs away (21 vs 39%) (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022). This duality in the opinions held by the German public is characteristic of recent years, dominated by economic and social concerns rather than moral or legal ones (Eurobarometer 2017). At the same time, the view that immigration is "an investment" and necessary for "the economy", to sustain prosperity as well as the pension system is held by an above-EU-average percent of Germans (Eurobarometer 2021).

Another trend shown by recent surveys is that the German public is moving towards a more participatory and opportunity-oriented understanding of integration. This indicates a slow, continuous readjustment of the perception of the host society's responsibility in relation to the immigrant's responsibility or "obligation", with the former coming more into focus. This trend is partly informed by grass-roots protest movements such as "Black Lives Matter". What is remarkable is the clear political linkage of the 2021 coalition government (Social-democratic, Green and Liberal parties) to these developments. In its explicit self-description as a representative of a modern immigration country, it seeks to do justice to the participatory demands inherent in the calls for "unity in diversity" (FAZ 2021). The programme of the coalition government marks a turning point in Germany's immigration and settlement policies which - as indicated by opinion polls - is finding increasing if far from enthusiastic social backing (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2021). Specifically, the declared aims are to make access to the labour market easier for people who have been living in Germany under

various residency titles, creating a route to residency for those whose deportation was suspended, fast tracks to citizenship of five or three years, extending family reunion options, among others (Bundesregierung 2021).

2.4 Selection of case studies

The above outline demonstrates that the "European migration crisis" of 2015 represents a pivotal event for migration narratives in the public at large, the media, and politics – making it a clear choice for case study 1. And while the impact of Ukrainian refugees on Germany is not yet well studied, it clearly represents a major event in recent decades. Indeed, policies as well as preliminary data on public attitudes suggest a kind of exceptionalism regarding Ukrainian refugees, thus making "the Ukrainian refugee crisis" a viable second case study. Significantly, cases 1 and 2 were selected within a comparative research design across the 6 countries participating in the research.

As the third case, we include the German response – in public attitudes, media and policy – to the humanitarian crisis following the fire in the "Moria" refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2020. While smaller in scale than the other case studies, this crisis brought to the foreground questions of Germany's moral obligation and its leadership in Europe, while also highlighting the role of grassroots activism and local (municipal) government.

Each case study begins with a brief introduction and overview of the national context, including relevant dynamics at the EU level, with regard to public attitudes, political discourse and policy-making. We then present a quantitative analysis of the respective case's coverage in key media and identify prominent narratives carried by them in relation to the case. We selected three prominent German newspapers that adequately represent the political spectrum: Bild, FAZ and Spiegel. Here and throughout, we discuss narratives in terms of their four components: setting, characters, plot and moral. We next give an overview of prominent narratives in the political debate during the same period, drawing on press releases of the federal government and political parties with representation in parliament, as well as speeches and debates in the German Bundestag. In all cases, the official record made available by the Bundestag will be used as data (see Archive of the Deutscher Bundestag 2023). While both media and political debate comprise the communicative sphere, we discuss in how far media narratives are ignored, adapted or embraced by politicians in terms of their four components and with respect to their lay or technocratic style.

Next, we identify key narratives in policy-making documents, i.e., documents integral to the policy-making process in Germany. This includes all topical policy proposals formally submitted to the German Bundestag, including both government proposals that are likely to win a majority and opposition proposals that are likely to fail. In either case, a proposal may be supplemented with additional explanatory documents and may receive written responses. While the narratives herein may overlap with parliamentary debate, this process is formally distinct. This analysis is followed by a discussion of the relationship between the communicative sphere and the coordinative sphere in terms of narratives. Finally, we conclude each case study by considering the deployment of narratives in different venues and across communicative and coordinative spheres.

3. Case studies

3.1 Case study 1: The European migration crisis in 2015 and the EU relocation scheme

a) Introduction to the case within the national context

As outlined in Section 2, German politics and public attitudes have for decades struggled with reconciling its de-facto status as an immigration country with an ethnonationalist understanding of the nation-state. Thus, migration was already a salient topic when the European migration crisis of 2015 began. Economic benefits, the need for migrant labour, and a sense of moral obligation and humanitarian leadership within Europe informed both German politics and the German public, while the sense that refugees especially represented a burden on the welfare state. However, a pronounced divide between the East and West, rooted in social and economic cleavages, existed in attitudes toward migration.

In September 2015, led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, the German government acted upon the notion of German moral leadership, embracing interlinked narratives of 'keeping German borders open' and of a crisis that 'we', the German state, were able to handle and had an obligation to help. While the public and the political establishment largely supported this stance, criticism and resentment grew, feeding into protest movements and eventually the electoral success the recently founded far-right, populist AfD.

The German government was successfully presenting itself as, at the European level, driving the debate on finding a European solution to the crisis: the German media were reporting this narrative in much detail. The key points proposed were the immediate externalisation of (joint) border controls, effectively establishing a unified European/EU border regime, the development of a European migration and asylum policy and the establishment of a relocation scheme using a distribution key that would be flexible to accommodate national schedules and capabilities. EU-internal borders, particularly those of the Schengen area, this proposal argued, should not be reinforced, or reinstated as an instrument of migration policy. This approach would have seen an internationalisation/Europeanisation of migration and asylum policies, meeting a mixture of reluctance and fierce opposition from some EU member states. Some, like Hungary, preferred instead a renationalisation of these policy domains, while simultaneously accusing the EU of failing to provide a solution.

Germany, the critics argued, had led without first ensuring EU support in suspending Dublin and putting its faith in a yet-to-be-implemented relocation scheme, falsely trusting that other EU countries would follow suit and take on a similar share of the social and financial "burden" – resulting, ultimately, in Germany carrying an inordinate share and being taken advantage of. The German government and public wanted what was called "a European solution", but the limited success of the EU relocation scheme was not seen as a satisfactory solution. While the government and opposition might have agreed on this point, opposition parties blamed the German government for having acted rashly and thus undermined a European solution from the start, making it less of a necessity for the rest of Europe.

It was not until September 13, 2015, that Germany began to impose border controls at the border to Austria in an effort to limit or stop migration, leading to what has been described as a "domino" effect in neighbouring countries such as Austria, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, also taking similar steps. The political and media debates that ensued were focused on both the reasons and consequences of Germany's open border policies.

b) Quantitative media analysis and narratives in the media

Quantitative media analysis of three major newspapers across the political spectrum (the right-leaning Bild, centrist FAZ, left-leaning Spiegel) for 2015 shows a clear peak of media attention on migration/refugees over the summer months, slowly abating by the end of the year. Regarding specific events, the death of Alan Kurdi, the deaths of 71 refugees in an air-tight van, and Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" speech on August 31, received the most media coverage. The following graph shows the frequency of news items referencing migration, migrants or refugees as well as references to a European solution or EU quotas in the three sampled newspapers across 2015. The media discussion of EU quotas roughly parallels the topic of migration with a delayed peak in October.

FIGURE 2: Number of news items referencing migration and EU relocation quotas in 2015 in Bild, FAZ and Spiegel
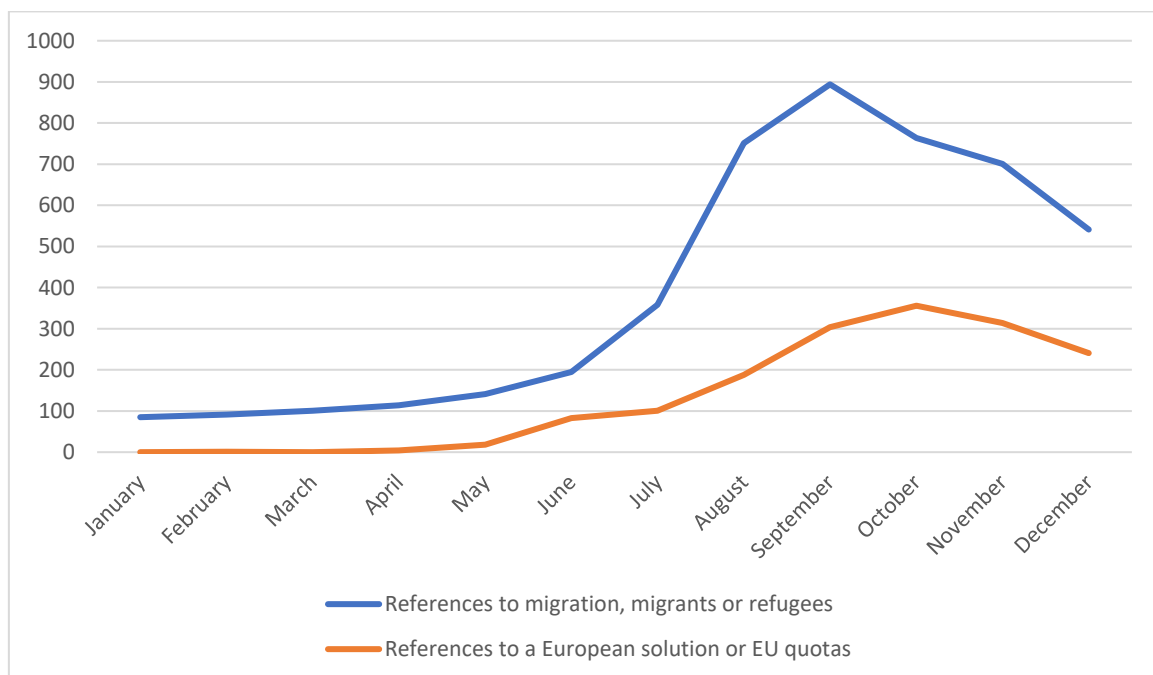
Source: Own elaboration

To identify prominent narratives, we sampled an equal number of articles from each newspaper from August and September 2015. We continued sampling until a saturation point was reached and no new narratives emerged, yielding a sample of 57 articles. Within this sample, the right-leaning Bild was outspoken in supporting the German open border policy but in actively campaigning to help refugees. This stance likely has less to do with its political leanings than with its extensive and emotional coverage of human suffering, and the related appeal to help ease such suffering. Bild reporting in August/September 2015, thus, focused on telling

narratives about the suffering and death of innocents, most prominently Alan Kurdi. When the newspaper's appeal to the public and to the German government to help was answered, as it has been argued, by Merkel's "Wir schaffen das", Bild took this up as an accompanying narrative about Germany/Germans following their moral obligations as well as demonstrating leadership in Europe. The latter, however, was tied to a further and increasingly prominent narrative of Europe not following or even taking advantage of Germany's generosity. The EU relocation quota system was criticised as flawed for allowing exceptions and opt-outs such as that of the UK, leaving an unfair burden for Germany or Germans to bear.

In contrast, the centrist FAZ remained notably more muted in its reporting. On the one hand, this can be characterized as a difference in tone and style of reporting rather than in narratives: FAZ also published narratives of refugees' suffering (albeit less personalised and sensational) and narratives about Germany's moral leadership as a country and German citizens' willingness to help. On the other hand, FAZ never campaigned like Bild did, and it addressed the issue of a European solution much earlier and more consistently. While German leadership was admirable and called for, the government was seen as having failed to ensure solidarity across the EU while it had negotiating power. Ultimately, the assessment of Germany's government having acted in isolation is similar to Bild.

The left-leaning Spiegel, while also outspoken in its support of humanitarian aid and open borders, does not link these to individual narratives of suffering as frequently and as strongly as to human solidarity and European responsibility for the causes of the migration crisis. And while Spiegel also criticises the lack of a functioning European asylum system, it does so in a systemic critique identifying those who benefit from its failures, politically and otherwise, and does not conclude that Germany is wrong in helping as it did in this context.

Narratives are predominantly lay in all three newspapers; nonetheless, we note a difference between Bild on the one hand and FAZ and Spiegel on the other hand: Bild featured exclusively lay narratives, while the other newspapers' narratives included more technocratic features. This distinction is noticeable across all four narrative components: Bild features exclusively vivid, urgent and predominantly personalised settings, while some narratives in FAZ and Spiegel incorporate wider perspectives. Similarly, Bild narratives always feature highly personalised characters and moralisation in dramatic, simple plots while offering up seemingly simple solutions in the form of humanitarian aid; the other newspapers focus more on institutional actors, complex frameworks and discuss long-term solutions.

TABLE 2: Main narratives in German media relating to the EU relocation scheme during the so-called migration crisis of 2015

Migrants/refugees are suffering, even dying.
Germany has the moral obligation to help.
Germany as a strong and prosperous nation has the capacity to help.
It is Germany's role in Europe to lead by example.
Germany is being taken advantage of by the rest of Europe.
Migration represents a global/ European challenge and therefore requires a global/ European solution.

Source: Own elaboration

c) Narratives in political debate

The German political debate on the migration crisis and EU quotas in 2015 was analysed in 9 parliamentary debates (sessions 118/18 through 126/18) between August 19 and September 30. The debate is characterised by a growing discrepancy on several levels: First, the federal government focuses on narratives of suffering, humanitarian crisis, the need to help and Germany's capacity to do so, while local conservative and/or populist politicians like Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer of the CSU are wary of accepting refugees. On this level, critique of the lacking or flawed European solution serves as a 'strawman' to criticize both the government and the EU. Government party narratives at the federal level focus on refugees as victims, typically avoid any villain characters, and use plots of flight, migration and suffering, leading to morals of humanitarian help. In contrast, federal level opposition parties as well as regional politicians of the government parties embrace narratives with EU institutions as villains, Germans as victims in plots surrounding policy failure and Germany's burden, with the moral of closing borders and forcing the EU to act.

Second, opposition on the federal level grew stronger in the course of September, creating increasing pressure on Merkel to reinstitute border controls. While the government continued to embrace the same narratives as before (Germany as hero, refugees as victims), now opposition parties on the federal level as well as regional politicians across the party spectrum increasingly embrace narratives of the EU and the German government as villains, Germany as victim, with plots of government failure and an irresponsible, naïve 'culture of welcoming'. The moral of these narratives is the immediate reversal of current policies as well as forcing the EU to act, not with humanitarian help or solidarity but by closing and protecting EU borders.

Third, the federal government focused on a positive narrative including the moral of humanitarian aid, being reluctant to publicly criticize or blame other EU member states as the opposition was doing. This shows a discrepancy between the frontstage politics of the federal government and of German state governments, as articulated in interviews, statements and

speeches addressing the German public.[1] Chancellor Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" speech is emblematic of this communicative strategy, combining narratives of human suffering with the narrative of Germany's moral obligation and capacity to help. It must not be overlooked, however, that a significant part of that speech is dedicated to the challenges of taking in so many refugees, and that Merkel's optimism about being able to handle the situation is as much a rousing compliment to Germany/Germans as it is a rebuke to the populist fear-mongering that Germany would be overrun.

d) Analysis of the relationship between media narratives and political narratives

Given that the massive Bild campaign to accept refugees preceded Merkel's decision to allow refugee's free passage, and given the narrative overlap between the three sampled newspapers and the political discourse, it is plausible to entertain the hypothesis that media narratives were both embraced and adapted in the political arena. However, since none of the narratives we found can be considered as genuinely originating in the media, e.g., Bild, the relationship between media narratives and political narratives remains complex. Notably, major newspapers were calling for Germany to accept more refugees and basing this call on narratives of human suffering and the moral of Germany's moral obligation and capacity to help, days and weeks before the German government acted; equally clearly, the federal government and its coalition parties at the federal level relied on very similar narratives in legitimising their migration policy. However, an argument can be made that this constituted 'adapting' rather than simply 'embracing' in the sense that the political discourse, no matter how optimistic, always addressed the challenges and costs in far greater detail. This turned a narrative of the nation generously helping into a narrative of the nation heroically overcoming challenges and leading by example: embracing characters (refugees as victims, Germany as hero), settings and plots (flight to Germany, human suffering), as well as the moral of the narrative (obligation to render humanitarian aid), while also adding impersonal obstacles and adversity needing to be overcome to the plot.

The fact that German media, irrespective of their political leanings, immediately and uncontroversially championed an open border policy, while remarkable, is entirely plausible in light of the prevailing understanding of Germany's historical responsibility and obligations. While the once generous policy (1949-1993) had been restricted in the Asylum Compromise of 1992, the master narrative seems to have endured and was thus in place, ready to be actualised in the specific circumstances of 2015. In its adaptation of media narratives, the German government embraced both the personalised moral of the lay narratives as well as the policy solution brought up in the more technocratic media narratives: immediate help is necessary, just and Christian, but a European framework for migration must also be found. Similarly, the political narratives took over both personalised dramatic plots about individuals or families as well as complex plots about international politics, corresponding to the respective morals mentioned before. Regarding other narrative components, the German government

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[1] The terms frontstage and backstage politics, as used by Wodak (2015), refer to the socio-linguistic distinction of political communication that is intended primarily for the general public or significant parts of it (frontstage) and political communication that is intended for a strictly limited audience, such as a cabinet of ministers, party functionaries or even party members.

adapted technocratic media narratives in focusing on wider settings and using generalised migration patterns, national and EU institutions as characters.

Concerning the specific issue of a European solution, specifically the EU quota system, the above-mentioned discrepancies are notable. The German government largely ignored media narratives of Germany being isolated or being taken advantage of, while the opposition – first locally, then nationally and even within the coalition government – did embrace narratives of other EU member states betraying Germany and benefiting from keeping their borders closed. In the political arena, however, this narrative was often adapted into a narrative of the government being weak, naïve, and failing to negotiate well on the EU level, thus betraying Germany or Germany's future.

Expert interviews with civil servants working in migration-related fields confirm that German politicians monitored media coverage of the so-called migration crisis, often delegating this task to a professional (IP1, IP3, IP5, IP6). Media coverage, so the interviewees, is generally taken as an indicator of public opinion, where specific media (newspapers) are treated as catering to more or less specific populations (IP7). Two interviewees mentioned that politicians were sometimes personally affected by media coverage of the migration crisis and, in general, may trust one medium too much/regard it as the authentic opinion of the people (IP2, IP5). Apart from newspapers, television, "the internet" and social media are channels for monitoring media coverage. Although the civil servants interviewed are not certain of this, they believe that politicians will change their rhetoric, agenda, and in the worst case even policy stance if they perceive a significant shift in media coverage (IP3, IP4). Particularly harrowing stories in the media can lead to sudden changes/irrational responses (IP6). Several interviewees emphasise that they do not have intimate knowledge of this and are sharing impressions (IP2, IP3, IP6).

e) Narratives in policy-making documents

During and in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis, numerous proposals for new laws or changes to existing laws were made in the German Bundestag, each of which was debated by party delegates. Of these, most concern measures to restrict asylum, accelerate asylum decisions, expedite deportations of, e.g., criminal offenders, or reform restrictions on recognised refugees. In Germany, proposals for legal changes are traditionally prefaced with a statement of a "problem" to be addressed by the law and an "aim" to be achieved. Together with the text of the proposed law, these texts largely mirror, in a more elaborate form, the arguments used by the respective political party in parliamentary debate and thus constitute a valuable source for textual analysis.

Taking into account the formal procedure of policy-making in Germany, the analysis comprises all policy proposals formally submitted and brought to a vote on the specific migration-related issue, accompanying explanatory documents included with the proposal, all formally submitted written responses, and the written version of any policy actually adopted, i.e., accepted by a majority vote. Thus, the policy-making process potentially includes the voices of all political parties represented in parliament and its committees and working groups, not only those parties that, due to a parliamentary majority, have formed the government.

In this case study, several dominant narratives are to be found in such policy-making documents. (1) The influx of migrants is unprecedented in the history of the German Bundesrepublik and represents a historical challenge. (2) Many migrants coming to Germany have no legal claim to asylum and do everything they can to avoid or delay departure. (3) Asylum procedures are slow and ineffective. (4) Many migrants ignore authorities' decisions and remain in Germany illegally. (5) Criminal offenders and migrants without legal status must be deported efficiently. (6) Germany has lost control of migration, to the great detriment of the German people. (7) Social and economic burdens are so high that legal claims arising from specific human rights, such as the right to family reunions, need to be suspended. (8) Individual cases must be considered carefully and may warrant exceptions to strict measures. (9) Human suffering knows no borders and therefore demands solidarity. (10) Migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean continue to die, including many children. (11) All refugees deserve help and should not be distinguished into "good" and "bad" according to origin, religion, culture etc. (12) The current migration will change Germany and, like other migration before, it will change Germany for the better.

f) Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere) and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)

Text analysis and expert interviews with civil servants working in the field of migration strongly suggest that there are structural, institutional reasons for the diffusion of different types of narratives across coordinative and communicative spheres. Interviewees concur that migration is discussed differently in different political/policy settings, and strikingly so. Their comments suggest that this is self-evident or obvious, from their perspective: there are administrative or technocratic settings that, by unwritten law or informal institution, determine what kind of narrative is appropriate and which is not, as opposed to deliberative settings like parliament and communicative settings like press conferences.

Overall, we found a mixture of technocratic and lay narratives (specifically in the context of making moralised appeals) in policy-making documents. This indicates the discourse overlap between political spheres in this genre, with the former often serving as "hard facts" and introducing numbers as arguments, whereas the latter introduce narratives that are well established in the communicative sphere and, beyond that, in the media as well. As hypothesised, there is a strong relationship between the media and political narratives than there is between communicative and coordinative sphere narratives – with some notable exceptions.

Within the communicative sphere, we find virtually all narratives run by the media also in political communication addressing the German public. Most prominently, those are narratives of human suffering, of Germany's moral obligation and capacity to help, and of Germany's leadership in Europe. Significant differences, however, exist in the dramatization, individualisation and appellative quality of these narratives, with political communication presenting somewhat toned-down versions, especially compared to broadsheet newspapers like Bild. Instances of embracing and adapting abound in the communicative sphere.

In contrast, the coordinative sphere – which, while accessible to the public, does not generally have the public as its primary audience – diverges significantly from the communicative sphere. Some instances of embracing or adapting narratives from the communicative sphere,

specifically those originating first in the media, can be recognised in opposition parties' arguing both for and against open borders. It can be argued that opposition parties, even in the coordinative sphere, might address their policy proposals more to the public than governing parties would, as these proposals have little to no chance of passing and serve communicative aims. Here, we see, e.g., the left-wing Die Linke embracing and adapting narratives of suffering, of solidarity, and of moral obligation.

More specifically, where the communicative sphere contained influential lay narratives, launched by media and adapted by politics, policy documents like the Asylverfahrensbeschleunigungsgesetz (Deutscher Bundestag 2015a) present predominantly technocratic narratives about the migration crisis with arguably important lay elements. Their setting is always general and supported with data, but characterised as urgent (the first significant lay element); their characters are abstract and collective actors, including generic references to refugees and migrants, statistics, and German institutions; their plots are focused on the big picture, yet present a dramatic and unprecedented situation for Germany (the second lay element); their morals show the duality of a humanitarian obligation and willingness to help those in need as well as the obligation to the German people to prevent abuse of said willingness. This duality might be regarded as an indication of a complex moral and foregoes explicit moralising. Slight variations of this pattern can be found in non-government parties' policy proposals and responses, including more lay elements like explicit moralising.

Politicians will usually engage with migration issues (a) if it is a genuine priority for them (IP3, IP5), (b) if they perceive it as an issue to score points on/that voters care about, usually by calling for stricter policies (IP2, IP3, IP4), (c) if there is no way to avoid the topic because it is high on the public agenda (IP1, IP3, IP5), or (d) if their advisors tell them they need to (IP2, IP4, IP6). Note that b, c and d may well be just different phrasings of/perspectives on the same phenomenon.

The civil servants interviewed, while not monitoring media coverage on migration professionally, stated that they do keep track of the political discourse and policy debate regarding migration. The interviewees describe themselves as engaged with the coordinative sphere rather than the communicative sphere; they see themselves as affected by migration policies rather than by media reporting on migration (IP3). Insofar as media coverage may change the agenda and, in rare cases, even policy, it does affect civil servants in their job as well, for example by shifting priorities, increasing the workload or creating new obstacles and challenges in their day-to-day work (IP1, IP6).

To the interviewees' knowledge, media coverage of migration issues is occasionally but not routinely discussed in policy-making, but the way political debates frame migration is indeed often discussed in policy settings (IP3). This is partly the case because it allows one to frame policy proposals but also to oppose or block proposals. Several interviewees mention the media/political frame of German leadership as an example of such framing, but also impactful images and narratives such as that of Alan Kurdi's death (IP1, IP5, IP6). Regarding the influence of debates (media and political) on policy proposals, all interviewees stated that there was certainly some influence during the 2015 crisis (IP2). Some emphasise that some policy proposals seem to be direct responses to such debates (IP3, IP4, IP5).

In many cases, the interviewees insist that "politicians" differ widely; populists may act one way ("running after the media", IP4), more "topic-focused" politicians will act another way (IP4); similarly, political leanings might influence how politicians engage with media reporting on migration, but also how they develop and instrumentalise policy proposals (IP2, IP7). In short, few things are universal across the political and policy-making field in Germany.

g) Concluding remarks

Narratives of human suffering and death, sometimes individualised as in the case of Alan Kurdi and sometimes collectivised in statistics, were deployed across the German media, political debates and, to a lesser extent, policy-making. Typically, this happened in the form of embracing or adapting media narratives and combining them with a second prominent narrative, i.e., Germany having both a moral obligation and the capacity to help. In the communicative sphere, such narratives serve to legitimise the German government's open border policies, but only in combination with other narratives, i.e., of migration bringing challenges but Germany being strong enough to overcome these. This can be seen in press releases and speeches by Chancellor Merkel and other government representatives throughout 2015. It must be noted, however, that these narratives are not entirely new and are firmly rooted in Germany's media and political discourse prior to 2015.

Narratives in the communicative sphere are presented predominantly in lay rather than technocratic style, arguably due to the emotional dimension of the narratives embraced and adapted. There is little variation between narratives in the media and the political debate in terms of the four narrative components considered: setting, plot, main characters and moral remain largely the same, with two perceptible shifts. For one, the protagonists are less individualised in the political sphere; for another, the moral of the story is not simply a humanitarian obligation to help but includes taking pride in overcoming the challenge as a strong nation and people. The one media narrative that is ignored or rejected by the government (but not the opposition) in the communicative sphere is that of acting rashly and in isolation, without ensuring a European solution that would reduce the burden for Germany.

In contrast to this strong relationship between media and political narratives within the communicative sphere, there is less overlap between this sphere and the coordinative sphere. This implies that most narratives are simply ignored in policy-making documents, except when it serves to make a statement to the general public. This strategy is mainly pursued by opposition parties, who use policy proposals and comments to government proposals to position themselves for the electorate. This is also the only scenario in which we find narratives in predominantly lay style, with the overwhelming majority of policy narratives being technocratic. Even in those few cases, such as narratives of refugees' suffering and death, we found no individualisation of the main characters as in the media and, less frequently, in the communicative sphere. In contrast, setting, plot and moral remain constant across the communicative and coordinative sphere:

In summary, between the communicative and coordinative sphere we find that most narratives are embraced, while a minority are adapted; however, there are also some media narratives that are ignored by the political debate in both the communicative and coordinative sphere. But as media are to be considered part of the comm sphere, do we just lose that distinction and

say these narratives are in the communicative sphere – even though they are only on the media side.

## 3.2   Case study 2: The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

a) Introduction to the case within the national context

Barely 7 years after the crisis of 2015, which after the initial consensus had led to a change in public attitudes, political divisions, and the rise of a new anti-migration opposition party, Germany was impacted by the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Apart from neighbouring Poland and Russia, Germany has taken in the largest number of Ukrainian refugees, estimated at more than one million (UNHCR 2022). Several contextual factors are relevant to Germany's clear commitment to support Ukrainian refugees: first, after worsening in 2015/2016, public attitudes toward migration had almost returned to what they were before; second, unlike in 2015, there is little to no debate over whether Ukrainians are actually refugees or, as was often alleged in 2015, economic migrants looking for a better life; third, the EU has invoked the Temporary Protection Directive which grants Ukrainians the right to stay, work, and study in any European Union member state – meaning that, unlike in 2015, there is a clear and uncontroversial EU framework in place; fourth, the refugees are considered "European", i.e., ethnically, culturally and religiously similar; fifth, the expectation is that most Ukrainians will want to return to their home country, making their stay a limited condition. In conjunction, these factors represent a strikingly different situation compared to the 2015 crisis. As the Temporary Protection Directive bypasses the restrictions implemented in the German asylum and migration system since 2015, Ukrainian refugees represent a distinct group also legally.

b) Quantitative media analysis and narratives in the media

Quantitative media analysis of three major newspapers across the political spectrum (the right-leaning Bild, centrist FAZ, left-leaning Spiegel) from February 1, 2022 to February 28, 2023 shows a relatively constant level of media attention on Ukrainian refugees over the period, with an expectedly sharp rise with the start of the Russian invasion and a slow decline over the following months. Regarding specific events, the EU decision to invoke the Temporary Protection Directive, received the most media coverage. The following graph shows the frequency of news items referencing Ukrainian refugees.
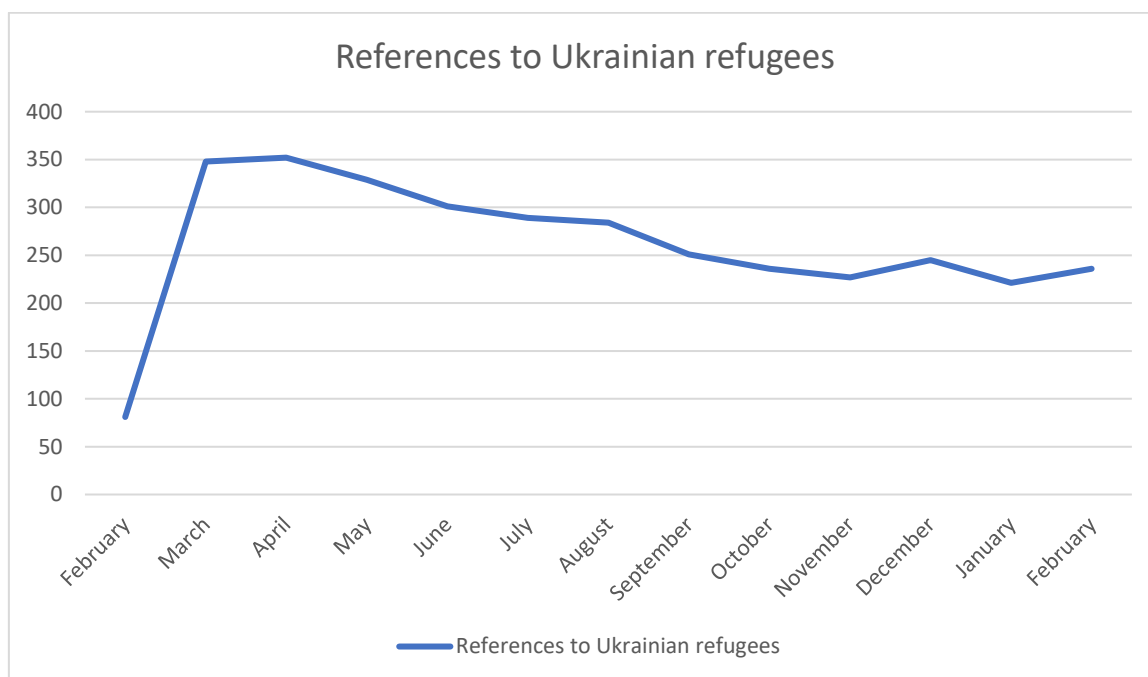
Source: Own elaboration

In our sample of German newspapers, the right-leaning Bild, the centrist FAZ and the left-leaning Spiegel were unanimous in supporting comprehensive help for Ukrainian refugees, including specifically the Temporary Protection Directive. While there has been some debate in German media over the extent and manner of military aid given directly or indirectly to Ukraine, no such divisions exist regarding the treatment of Ukrainian refugees. As might be expected, the three newspapers differ in style and tone of their reporting on Ukrainian refugees, as well as regarding the attention given to the causes, responsibility and implications of the war itself.

The broadsheet Bild tends to individualise narratives of suffering, focusing on families and children, and includes appeals to its readers (to donate or help in some other way), while also foregrounding the generous efforts of Germany/Germans in helping. Both FAZ and Spiegel tend to devote more space and greater detail to the wider ramifications of the conflict.

Dominant narratives in Bild focus on the physical and emotional suffering of Ukrainians, especially families and children, indicating a strongly gendered dimension to their narratives about Ukrainian refugees. Being forced to leave one's home, family, friends etc. behind is narrativised in many variations, which – unlike in 2015 – creates a relatable setting and emphasises the cultural similarity between life in Ukraine and Germany. Geographical as well as cultural, ethnic and religious proximity are prominent circumstances in these narratives. The status of 'refugee', regardless of legal title, is used throughout Bild's reporting, the word 'migrant' is entirely absent. In Bild, such narratives exist exclusively about Ukrainians wanting to go/having gone West, ethnic Russians who have also become refugees are excluded from such accounts. Interestingly, and unlike in 2015, Germany's moral obligation to help is not so much narrativized as presumed as given; instead, a new narrative focuses on

Germany/Germans acting morally right/admirably by helping. Bild does not narrativise the burden that such help represents on Germany/the welfare state; indeed, the economic consequences are absent from the reporting. The narrative of Germany's leadership returns, but unlike in 2015 this is narrativised as factual, not a debate, and supported through numbers in lay style (refugees accepted, aid given, etc.).

The news reporting in FAZ is more balanced between narratives about Ukrainian refugees' suffering and their arrival or new lives in Germany, giving more agency to them than Bild does. Without Bild's individualisation, the generational narrative about Ukrainian families and children is also found in FAZ. A certain tension arises here with narratives about Ukrainians being not just refugees but also soldiers, sometimes with the same individual being both at different times. Rather than simply embracing the position that Ukrainians are geographically, ethnically, culturally and religiously close to Germany/Germans, some articles in the paper also reflect on this bias and the resulting difference in treatment. The reporting on Ukrainian refugees and German help also includes, often as background, discussion of the wider geopolitical context and German/European foreign policy – thus manifesting a more technocratic narrative style. From this, Germany's responsibility or moral obligation is emphasised. Germany is thus not simply a hero in these narratives but also a villain, at least indirectly complicit.

The left-leaning Spiegel, while carrying similar versions of the narratives about Ukrainian refugees, is explicit in criticising double standards and the larger responsibility of Germany/Europe in the conflict. The notion that geographical, ethnic and cultural proximity should give Ukrainian refugees special status is rejected, but not to the effect of denying them access but rather to reveal the double-standards. Although no counter-narrative or policy is proposed, the implication is that ethnicity or religious identity should not be grounds of exclusion or inclusion. Here, comparisons are also drawn to the aftermath of the 2015 crisis and increased xenophobia or anti-migrant sentiment in Germany.

TABLE 3: Main narratives in German media relating to the Ukrainian refugee crisis

Ukrainian refugees are suffering, they have lost everything.
Ukrainians are not simply refugees, they are also fighting for their country, families and homes in more ways than one.
Children are affected the worst; a whole generation of Ukrainians is affected by experience of being refugees.
Ukrainians are geographically, ethnically, culturally and religiously close to Germany/Germans.
Germany/Germans are acting morally right/admirably by helping.
Germany is leading in Europe with respect to taking in refugees and sending aid to Ukraine.
German/European foreign policy has failed to prevent the war, leading to increased moral responsibility to help now.

Refugees, no matter their ethnicity or culture, deserve equal support. Treating Ukrainians as an exception reveals double standards and structural racism in Germany.

Source: Own elaboration

c) Narratives in political debate

The German political debate on Ukrainian refugees in early 2022 was analysed in 8 parliamentary debates (sessions 19/20 through 26/20) between February 27 and March 25. The political debate is unanimous regarding support of Ukrainian refugees in general and regarding specific refugee policies in particular. The narrative here is clear: Russia is the villain in its war of aggression, Ukrainians are victims and, as such, deserve Germany's help. Their status as refugees is taken as a given regardless of asylum procedures. There is notably less justifying or legitimising of Ukrainian refugees in the political debate than there was in 2015, and the challenges are treated in similarly marginal manner. There seems to be no need for a similar message of overcoming great obstacles as with Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" in the sense that there was never a question of whether Germans should help and whether Germany would be able to help. A further prominent narrative in the political debate is that the war is happening in Europe, and that a threat to Europe is a threat to Germany, creating a parallelism between the German and Ukrainian population. Geographical and cultural proximity are a salient aspect of this narrative, which is embraced by all political parties in a similar lay style as in the media; long-term policy considerations that one would expect in technocratic-style narratives are conspicuously absent. Variations in the moral can only be found beyond the refugee question, when it comes to aiding Ukraine in the form of military equipment or financing. The two interrelated narratives of Germany acting morally right as well as admirably and of Germany taking the lead in Europe's efforts are present but less prominent in the political debate than in the media. Finally, the failures of Germany/Europe's foreign policy in pursuing a "change through trade" ("Wandel durch Handel") approach to Russia's imperialist tendencies are narrativized and linked to the current obligation to help refugees. This narrative also frequently branches off into debates over trade relations, Germany's dependency on Russia for energy, and energy security in general.

d) Analysis of the relationship between media narratives and political narratives

There are strong parallels between the narratives found in our analysis of German media and political debates regarding the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Political actors seem to embrace the narrative that Ukrainians are not just geographically but ethnically, culturally close or alike, implying their separateness as a group of refugees. Due to the Temporary Protection Directive, this exceptionalism does not need to be justified or legitimised in political debate, but the notion of proximity is nonetheless present in terms of comparisons and repeated emphasis of likeness. This narrative is however explicitly rejected by some media. The narratives of Germany helping in an exemplary fashion, leading European efforts, is embraced unequivocally in the political debate. The political debate ignores the narrative of Ukrainians refugees also being soldiers or fighting, focusing strongly on their status as victims. If the war is mentioned, the Ukrainian armed forces are presented as an entirely separate entity/collective. Although there are women in the Ukrainian armed forces, neither the media nor the political debate reflects this. Indeed, these narratives are strongly gendered: Women, children and men appear as victims, while heroes staying in Ukraine to fight are men.

e) Narratives in policy-making documents

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, a relatively small number of proposals for new laws or changes to existing regulations have been made in the German Bundestag, each of which was debated by party delegates. Of these, most concern the special status of Ukrainian refugees in relation to general asylum or residency procedures, access to the labour market and welfare, as well as special provisions for Ukrainian children within the German educational system. With few exceptions, these documents are predominantly technocratic and – in contrast to the crisis of 2015 – devoid of narratives used to create emotional appeal or legitimise proposals.

The status and the needs of Ukrainian refugees are treated as an administrative matter, the details of which might require debate of regulations, but not as a controversial issue as such. Exceptions to this rule can be found, for example, in proposals made by the left-wing party Die Linke, which makes the argument that the ease of access given to Ukrainians should not be the exception but the rule for all asylum seekers (Deutscher Bundestag 2022a). This can be regarded as an adaptation of the narrative, found in Spiegel, that inasmuch as human rights are universal all refugees deserve equal help.

f) Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere) and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)

The relationship between media and political narratives in the communicative sphere is close regarding narratives concerning the Ukrainian refugee crisis, with most media narratives being embraced or closely paralleled in politics. The narrative element of Ukrainians' proximity or similarity to Germans is embraced in government politics without the reflection or criticism that some media voice. It seems significant, however, that these narratives are used less to legitimise or justify the stance of the German government than to affirm the established consensus. Narratives nevertheless play an important role in the communicative sphere in this case study, as they serve to contextualise and anchor the issue within hegemonic discourse. This is noteworthy especially with the master narrative about Germany's leadership within Europe. In contrast, the coordinative sphere shows very little overlap between narratives in the communicative and the coordinative sphere, respectively, with the latter focused on administrative matter without the pressure of political legitimisation around controversial policies. Apart from the divergence between predominantly lay-style narratives in the former and predominantly technocratic style in the latter, there is thus also a clear divergence of content: virtually no narratives from the communicative sphere are embraced in the coordinative sphere. While the key characters of communicative sphere narratives – Ukrainians as both heroes and victims, Russia/Russians as villains – also appear in coordinative sphere narratives, all other elements diverge: settings, plot and policy solutions are different across all but one narrative. The narrative of Ukrainians as exceptional and deserving refugees due to their ethnic and cultural proximity, which originated with the media and was taken up in the political debate, thus stands out when it appears in policy-making documents authored by both the government parties and left-wing oppositional party Die Linke; while the opposition also embraces this narrative, it rejects the resultant exceptionalism and demands a general liberalisation of asylum policy.

The expert interviews we conducted with civil servants shed additional light on this relationship. Despite the attention German politicians generally give to media as an indicator of public opinion, interviewees insisted that in the case of the Ukrainian refugee crisis this played next to no role (IP1, IP4, IP5, IP6) in how the issue was handled in the coordinative sphere. One civil servant described communication in this context as "self-evident" and "clear from the start" (IP4), suggesting the broad consensus that emerged across media and the political arena was strongly anticipated, even taken as a given. A further comment suggests that the Ukrainian refugee crisis presented an administrative but not a communicative challenge, and in this is very much unlike the 2015 crisis (IP2).

g) Concluding remarks

The fact that Germany's stance on taking in Ukrainian refugees is virtually uncontroversial in the public and political sphere (with controversy erupting rather around military help for Ukraine and assessment of Germany's foreign policy in the past) is borne out by a remarkable consistency of narratives across various media and political debate (the communicative sphere) and, it might be argued, the dearth of narratives serving appellative and legitimising functions in the coordinative sphere.

From media to the communicative sphere of politics, narratives of Ukrainians as suffering and as geographically, ethnically and culturally similar to Germans are embraced in lay narrative style. Similarly, the narrative of Ukrainian children, a whole generation, being affected and requiring special support is embraced in the communicative sphere in its lay form. The exception among narratives about Ukrainians is the political debate ignoring media narratives about Ukrainian refugees having fought or returning to fight. Concerning narratives with Germany/Germans as protagonists – acting morally right, leading Europe –, these are embraced and sometimes adapted in a more technocratic version in the communicative sphere, emphasising administrative efforts and numbers. Narratives that present a critical version of Germany's foreign policy in the past, identifying a degree of complicity or at least responsibility, are adapted in lay form by opposition parties. Finally, only the far-left embraces, still in lay form, media narratives that reflect on the double standards and exceptionalism inherent in the special status given to Ukrainian refugees.

Regarding the coordinative sphere, there is an almost complete divide regarding narratives: virtually none of the narratives in the media or the communicative sphere are to be found, even when the same issues are covered. This is not simply an issue of a technocratic style but of narrativization, or lack thereof. Consider, for example, the issue of integrating Ukrainian children into the German school system: as a complex issue, this is the subject of detailed policy-making and thus covered in technocratic detail, but the narrative of children refugees' suffering, individually or as a generation, is entirely absent. When facts are mentioned, they are stated or described (e.g., the number of children), but they are not narrativized in the sense that two of the four essential components of narrative are missing: plot and moral.

3.3 Case study 3: The humanitarian crisis following the fire in Moria

### a) Introduction to the case within the national context

In the years following Germany's reinstitution of border controls during the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, several changes to its refugee and migration policies created a more restrictive asylum regime. While public attitudes towards migration had initially worsened, they were returning to pre-2015 crisis levels by 2020, including the combination of a generally positive outlook with the widespread view that migrants are a burden on the welfare state. During those years, both opponents and advocates of a more liberal immigration and asylum regime had organised and campaigned for their respective goals. On the one hand, the recently founded Alternative für Deutschland provided a political platform for anti-immigration narratives; on the other hand, several grass-roots organisations had been founded to work towards acceptance and better integration of refugees as well as towards a general opening-up of Germany's (and, beyond that, Europe's) refugee policies (see WP4 for an in-depth discussion of these movements and their narratives on migration).

In this context, the horrendous humanitarian situation of thousands of refugees at the Moria camp on the Greek island of Lesbos had attracted some public attention over the previous months, but neither media nor politics in Germany had made this a priority. When a fire destroyed most of the camp on September 9, 2020, the images and stories of the 12,600 refugees who had lost their only shelter and belongings in the blaze drew immediate attention from media, politics and the public. Media and NGOs immediately called upon the German government to send immediate humanitarian aid and take in additional refugees specifically from Moria, outside of and beyond the EU quota system. While the federal government was relatively slow to debate and eventually decide on the number of refugees as well as a selection procedure for taking them in, the municipal governments of several major cities quickly committed to taking in refugees from Moria.

b) Quantitative media analysis and narratives in the media

Quantitative media analysis of three major newspapers across the political spectrum (the right-leaning Bild, centrist FAZ, and left-leaning Spiegel) from August 3, 2020 to November 2, 2020 shows a sharp peak in the level of media attention following the catastrophic fire, gradually declining over the following three weeks, before disappearing almost entirely in early October. In quantitative terms, the reporting in Bild was particularly intense. Regarding specific events, the immediate aftermath of the fire itself, civil protests by German NGOs calling on the government to take in refugees, and news related to suspected arson at the camp stand out. The following graph shows the frequency of news items referencing refugees at or from Moria.

FIGURE 4: Number of news items referencing refugees at Moria in Bild, FAZ and Spiegel
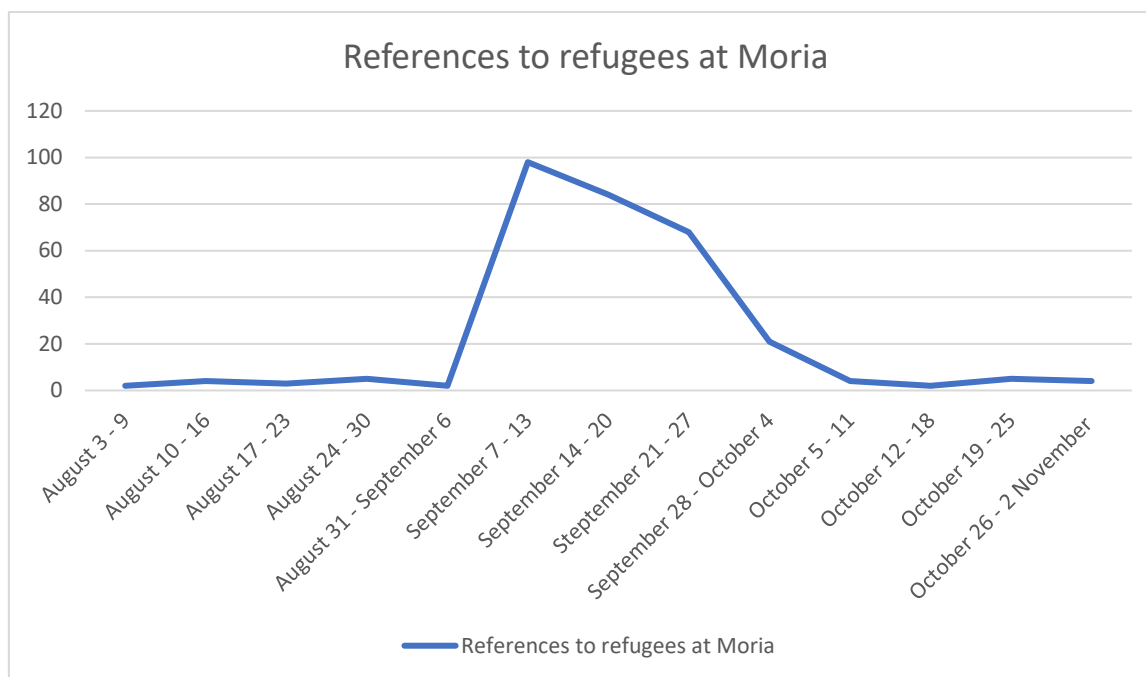
Source: Own elaboration

Unlike case studies 1 and 2, media narratives diverge significantly regarding refugees at Moria and therefore need to be discussed in more detail. The right-leaning tabloid *Bild* sensationalized the fire and resulting humanitarian catastrophe in the refugee camp. From the start, the newspaper ran multiple articles about the events per day, peaking in 12 articles on a single day. The dominant narrative in this flurry of reporting and commentary was that children are suffering and need to be helped. *Bild* thus narrowed the focus of its narrative almost immediately from migrants/refugees to children who had become shelterless. The larger situation of migration and the history of the camp did not enter this narrative except with reference to the Greek authorities' failure and blame. Helping the suffering children was presented not as a question of migration or asylum policy, or of political responsibility on the EU level, but of German morality and a tradition of helping those in need. In short, *Bild* sensationalized the fire while also depoliticizing it completely by ignoring the question of EU quotas.

A further prominent narrative in *Bild* focused on the responsibility/blame of Greece and, to a lesser extent, the EU (consistently referred to as "Brussels"). While the former are described as immediately responsible through negligence, the latter are criticized for not finding a solution and the quota idea not working. Germany is presented as the shining moral example, with the EU (both Brussels and other EU MS) portrayed as remiss, hesitant or egoistic.

The third major narrative focuses on the individual fate of one specific girl in Moria. As this is not just one reportage but a narrative focus over more than a week, this individualization of the catastrophe deserves special note, inasmuch as the girl is fair-skinned and blonde, with *Bild* calling her "the blonde girl of Moria". Indeed, the girl was chosen by *Bild* because she stands out so much among the dark-skinned and black-haired refugees in the camp. Presumably, this

choice is meant to make the suffering of the children even more shocking and relatable to a German audience, but it betrays a naturalized ethnic/racist bias.

The interrelated morals of these narratives can be summarized as follows: First, suffering children deserve help, regardless of whether they are refugees or migrants. Germany has a moral obligation to help, not because of migration policy failures but its values. Adult refugees are not included in this moral equation. Second, the idea of EU quotas is flawed and the asylum system is defunct. The EU is to blame for this, whereas Germany is a shining example of humanitarianism. Third, children are generally deserving of help, but even more so when they look like 'us'. In all of this, *Bild* avoids larger questions of asylum, refugees/migrants being held in camps, and of the European asylum systems, preferring to focus on the humanitarian dimension. The victims in these narratives are the children of Moria; Germany is the hero/called upon to be the hero again, while Greece and the EU are villains.

In contrast, the centrist *FAZ* reports on the events in much wider perspective. Its dominant narrative is that the fire at the Moria refugee camp has left countless refugees without shelter. This humanitarian catastrophe has been a long time coming and the local authorities, the Greek government, and the EU did nothing to prevent it. Humanitarian aid must now be given urgently by all of Europe/the EU. The *FAZ* does not focus on children and it contextualizes the events historically, geographically and politically.

Its second narrative is that the entire EU is responsible for the humanitarian catastrophe in Moria, it is a result of d migration policies and negligence. Germany should not - not again - be the first to help, should not lead the humanitarian efforts or shoulder more than other EU countries out of a mistaken sense of moral obligation. We need a European/EU solution.

In both narratives, the EU is the main villain, Greek authorities also appearing as secondary villains. However, it is made clear that Greece has been left alone with this problem by the EU. Refugees/migrants at Moria are consistently presented as the victims. Germany is presented as a controversial hero, perhaps too eager to help. Indeed, the *FAZ* argues that it would be wrong and even dangerous of Germany to rush to the refugees aid now, taking pressure of the EU and thereby risking that the obviously broken EU quota system gets reformed. In short, the *FAZ* argues that Germany should not lead humanitarian efforts as it did in 2015, and wait/insist that other EU Member States commit credibly to doing their part.

The morals of the two narratives are in tension: the first one's moral is that help must be given urgently; the second moral is that Germany should not give help unilaterally and wait until there is a European solution.

The left-leaning *Spiegel*, like *FAZ*, focused one narrative on the European responsibility for the fire and the immediate suffering after the fire at Moria. However, unlike *FAZ*, *Spiegel* did not use this narrative to argue that Germany should not lead the humanitarian efforts: Due to negligence and the appalling conditions in the camp, a fire broke out or may have been set in protest, which has now made the majority of the refugee shelterless. The resulting humanitarian catastrophe is the direct result of said negligence. The events leading to the fire and the lack of immediate response/help reveal the failure of European migration policy, indeed of Europe and European values as such. Europe can no longer claim moral high ground, or take pride in its culture and values, if it does not act upon them.

The second major narrative in the *Spiegel* is that suffering is suffering, no matter who is responsible, and the moral obligation remains the same: Anyone /country who can help, must act now to the extent that they can help, and not delay for political reasons or because they helped someone else 5 years ago. Both narratives combine settings in Greece, Europe and Germany. In both cases, refugees/migrants are the victims, with the EU as villain; Germany appears as a controversial hero/villain inasmuch as it is complicit in the European/EU failures but has previously led humanitarian efforts.

The immediate moral of this first narrative is that Europe as a whole is responsible for this. Beyond helping now, the EU must reform its migration policies and quota system at once. Many mistakes have been made in the past regarding EUropean migration policies. Germany has tried to compensate by taking in more refugees than any other European country. This should not have been necessary in the first place, but Germany should act now being able to help, regardless of policy issues and power games at the EU level. The secondary moral is that Germany needs to do its part. Regardless of past help, or political responsibility, anyone who can help must help urgently, regardless of quotas or promises of other EU MS. Political strategy and power games must not increase the suffering of refugees who are already the victims of EU/European policies.

TABLE 4: Main narratives in German media relating to refugees at Moria

Children are suffering and must be helped immediately.
Germany is an exemplary leader in humanitarian help.
The EU and Greece are equally to blame for the humanitarian catastrophe.
The "blonde girl of Moria" represents the suffering of refugee children, best demonstrating the need to help them.
The fire at the Moria refugee camp has left countless refugees without shelter.
The humanitarian catastrophe at Moria is the result of long neglect, for which all of the EU/Europe is responsible.
A coordinated European solution is needed, Germany should not lead efforts.
The EU has abandoned Greece.
German municipal governments are volunteering/committing to taking in refugees.

Source: Own elaboration

c) Narratives in political debate

The German political debate on refugees at Moria in 2020 was analysed in 7 parliamentary debates (sessions 173/19 through 179/19) between September 10 and September 30. The debates revolving around the refugees at Moria who had been left without shelter by the fire

can be described as developing through two phases, with corresponding narratives. In the first phase, the main narratives were focused on the suffering of refugees (in general, with no focus on children), on the failure of Greek authorities to prevent adequate shelter and healthcare, and on the options available to Germany to help. In the second phase, the political debate shifted to suffering of children, how to help and how many children to take in, as well as on the failures of Europe's or the EU's policies and the resulting responsibility to help. Across the first phase, there is little division across the political spectrum, with the dominant narratives being (1) The fire has created a humanitarian catastrophe; (2) Refugees are suffering and must be helped; (3) Greek authorities are unable/are failing to address the situation adequately; (4) Germany will help but it is not yet clear how we can help. In the second phase, in contrast, the narratives of government and opposition parties diverged somewhat: While the government moved to a narrative of suffering focused on refugee children, the opposition retained a broad perspective on the humanitarian situation at Moria. And while the government held on to a narrative of Greek failure and a European or EU-level failure of migration policies, the opposition included the German government in this narrative of policy failure. Consensus continued in the narrative that Germany would help; here, the political left and centre tended to emphasise the role of German leadership and the political right insisted on a European solution. However, no party opposed the evolving plans to take in a limited number of refugee children beyond existing quotas, specifically because these children did not fall under the suspicion of being economic migrants or having committed arson. The style of narratives in political debates was remarkably similar to the lay-style narratives in the media, with the exception of the sensationalised narrative in the tabloid Bild that had no correspondence in political debates.

D) Analysis of the relationship between media narratives and political narratives

The political debate embraced the narrative of the fire causing the humanitarian catastrophe and, during the first phase, of refugees suffering as a result. Significantly, these and virtually all other narratives pertaining to Moria retained their lay style across settings, characters, plots and morals when embraced in the political debate. The focus on children, or even on a single girl, which was pushed by tabloid media, was initially ignored in the political debate but later embraced by the government. The media narrative of Germany as an exemplary leader in humanitarian help was also embraced and retained its lay style; in some cases, this narrative was adapted in its moral to establish a link to the 2015 crisis, giving it a technocratic moral: that a large-scale, fundamental reform of European asylum and migration policies was necessary, and beyond that a stronger geopolitical engagement in fighting the causes of mass migration, including war, terror, poverty and climate change.

During its first phase, the political debate further embraced the narrative that EU policies and the Greece authorities were to blame for the humanitarian catastrophe, ignoring – until the second phase – Germany's part in these failures, which the broadsheet media discussed almost immediately and the tabloid ignored throughout. The political debate on the federal level ignored the narrative about German municipal governments committing to taking in refugees. The narrative that the EU – and, by implication, Germany – had abandoned Greece, was ignored by the government even in the second phase, when it was embraced by opposition parties on both the left and the right. The opposed narratives that Germany should lead efforts immediately (found in Bild and Spiegel) and that Germany should help only as part of a coordinated European solution (FAZ), were embraced by the left to centre-left and the centre-

right to right of the political spectrum, respectively. While in the media, political leanings did not decide this pattern, they seem to predetermine the position in the political arena.

e) *Narratives in policy-making documents*

It is noteworthy that the ad-hoc policy-making following the fire at Moria was more conflictual than the narratives embraced in the communicative sphere. This is perhaps best explained by the fact that some political actors saw the catastrophe as the symptom of a larger failure in migration policy and used the events to propose a fundamental change in policy, while other political actors insisted on treating the events as an exceptional catastrophe that should be met only with exceptional, one-time measures such as taking in a limited number of refugee children or families. Such differences of opinion were found not only between government and opposition but within the governing parties, and thus manifested in documents involved in the policy-making process as well.

Policy proposals made by the left-wing Die Linke embrace narratives (Bundestag 2020a, 2020b) from the communicative sphere, following the lay style in terms of immediate setting, personalised characters, and urgent plot; however, the moral of these narratives is presented in technocratic style and as a large scale policy-change: all refugee camps on the Greek island should be closed, a significant number of refugees be taken in by Germany, and Germany should do everything in its power to change EU refugee policies. Similar narrative patterns were found in policy proposals submitted by the Greens (Bundestag 2020c, 2020d), embracing a lay-style narrative about suffering to then argue a technocratic policy change: in addition to substantial immediate aid European refugee policy should be reset and liberalised. Both parties thus based their policy proposals on a combination of narratives identified in the media but ignored by the German government: that while the fire had aggravated the suffering of the refugees at Moria, the root cause was systemic and not limited to Moria alone; that failures by Greek authorities did not absolve Europe, including Germany in its self-declared role of moral leadership, of responsibility for long-standing failures in policy. We would argue that these complex morals, which we also found in some narratives in broadsheet newspapers, qualify as technocratic rather than lay.

Within the policy-making process, both the government and the right-wing opposition embraced narratives – found in the media, especially tabloids – about refugee children as innocent and therefore deserving victims and the implication that adult refugees were less deserving. These policies also embraced the narratives that the fire caused the suffering, that the Greek authorities were to blame for the fire and lack of healthcare, and that Germany's willingness to take in children outside of established quotas demonstrates its moral leadership. In addition, we find this position linked to the narrative that Germany was inordinately and unfairly burdened by the 2015 crisis, compared to most other European countries (Bundestag 2020e, 2020f, 2020g). Remarkably, these embraced narratives largely retain their lay style, including a simple moral – as simple as in the tabloid media.

f) *Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere) and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)*

The fire at Moria presents the most controversial and complex case of relationships between media, political narratives and policy-making narratives. First, there are several clear cases of media narratives being embraced and others being initially or entirely ignored in the political debate, within the communicative sphere. This includes the focus on the fire causing suffering, the focus on children, and Germany being an exemplary leader (universally embraced); narratives about Greek authorities or Europe being mainly responsible for the suffering (embraced by the government); narratives about Germany being complicit in the long-term neglect of Greek refugee camps and the resulting humanitarian catastrophe (embraced by some opposition parties); narratives about "the white girl of Moria" (universally ignored). While the narratives in our media sample are not divided along political divides but rather in terms of sensationalism and analysis, the political debate shows a left-to-centre vs. centre-to-right division in terms of blame-narratives.

Turning to the relationship between communicative and coordinative sphere, we see that this division is widened to controversy in the coordinative sphere, with policy-making narratives revealing that what is ultimately at stake is not immediate help or the number of children taken in but the radical questioning of current EU refugee policy as the root cause of the catastrophe at Moria. While the communicative sphere ignored the narrative about German municipal governments committing to taking in refugees from Moria, this was adapted in policy proposals made by left-wing opposition parties to argue that there was wide-spread willingness in the German public to help.

The expert interviews with civil servants proved most revealing in this case study. Most interviewees cited or confirmed the case of Moria as a case where politics paid close attention to the media (IP1, IP3, IP4, IP6), in particular the focus on children in popular media (IP2), which provided a way out of the dilemma of wanting to appear ready to address the emergency beyond already agreed-upon quotas while avoiding a fundamental debate over systemic issues in European migration policies (IP1, IP2, IP3, IP6). In contrast, the ensuing, lengthy debate over the exact number of children to be taken in, reported on in detail by the media, is cited as a communicative disaster, making politics appear "bickering, divided and indecisive" (IP3). Media narratives about the humanitarian catastrophe at Moria as the collective "shame of Europe", while emotionally powerful, could not be embraced by governing parties due their implications (IP1).

g) *Concluding remarks*

The case of Moria presents a relatively short and highly dynamic interplay between media and political debate within the communicative sphere, on the one hand, and between the entire communicative sphere and the coordinative spheres, on the other hand. While it is difficult to determine whether the media's strong emphasis on the suffering of refugee children influenced first the political debate and then the coordinative sphere, or whether politics seized and exploited existing lay narratives in order to avoid a more fundamental debate while being seen as helping quickly and effectively, we were able to ascertain that specific media narratives were deliberately and strategically embraced while others were ignored. Moreover, the deployment of narratives changes noticeably within the space of three weeks, giving the

impression of two phases in the communicative sphere. We also see interesting divergences in how narratives are taken up or ignored according to government/opposition and left/right positions and respective agendas, in both the communicative and the coordinative sphere.

The coordinative sphere embraced several narratives that, while originating with the media, had been taken up in the communicative sphere. When the government did so, it retained the lay style of these narratives across setting, character, plot and moral – significantly, keeping the solution on a simple level. This illustrates that policy-making documents are, in principle, open to narratives in lay style. While the communicative sphere might retain lay style to create/maintain emotional appeal in addressing the public, in the coordinative sphere this seems to have happened in order to justify, at least implicitly in the sense of narrative plausibility, the small-scale, one-time measure of taking in a fixed number of children/families: when lay settings, characters and plots point to a correspondingly simple moral, narrative congruence can help naturalise/make plausible such a narrow measure. Correspondingly, policy proposals presenting a complex, big picture policy change as their narrative's moral tend to also use technocratic style settings, characters and plots.

4. Conclusions across the three case studies

The following paragraphs cover key findings and conclusion across the aspects of public attitudes towards migration as well as migration narratives in media reporting, political debates and policy making pertaining to the 'migration crisis' of 2015, the humanitarian catastrophe at the refugee camp 'Moria', and the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees in 2022.

During the time period covered in this report, public opinion on migration in Germany underwent significant changes that can be described as a kind of cycle: initially a predominantly positive attitude to migration, tied closely to the need for labour and economic prosperity; in the wake of the 'migration crisis' of 2015 a significantly more negative attitude focused on cultural and religious assimilation, reading migrants as burdens on the German welfare state; and towards 2022 a gradual return to a generally positive attitude and the focus on economic necessity and benefit of migration – albeit opposed by a stronger and more confident far-right opposition. This apparent cycle of attitudes suggests that the German public holds a largely persistent positive attitude and corresponding narratives about labour migration; that this persistent attitude may have been not replaced but merely displaced or overshadowed for a period; that a return to the persistent frame was perhaps not inevitable but likely, given the resilience of hegemonic discourse; and that, finally, this cycle is not trivial but accompanied by significant disruptions of the political landscape.

Remarkably, these changes in attitude – well documented by surveys and indicated by election results that support the idea of shifting attitudes – are not paralleled by similar changes in media narratives. In all three case studies, within the communicative sphere, the media maintain positive migration narratives that generally feature migrants/refugees as victims, Germany/Germans as heroes, with plots that focus on migrant's journey and suffering as well as Germany's efforts to render help, with the moral of the obligation to help. Germany as hero is presented as overcoming significant obstacles and shouldering notably burdens in doing so.

In the case of the migration crisis of 2015 and Moria in 2020, villains are often absent in these stories, especially those told in lay-style, in the media and the political debate. Villains do appear in more technocratic narratives that identify villains on the European or international level, as governments failing or neglecting to develop adequate migration policies. Such technocratic-style narratives are found only in broadsheet newspapers, where tabloids' lay-style narratives remain focused on individualised characters and short-term, simplistic morals. It is only in the more technocratic narratives that any kind of analysis of the root causes and issues is attempted, and that past German governments' role in Europe's failing migration policies is sometimes recognised, making Germany a villain on a level different from that of humanitarian aid or open borders, where Germany is the consistent hero of media narratives. In the case of Ukrainian refugees in 2022, in contrast, the role of villain is present even in lay-style narratives in the form of Russia (variously the country, Putin, or the military). The second major difference here is that the lay-style morals sometimes include military aid in addition to humanitarian aid.

We found that the political debate took up – embracing and adapting – the vast majority of lay-style narratives identified in the media, excepting the following instances: broadsheet newspapers' technocratic narratives about EU policy failure that implicated Germany (2015 and 2022) and highly personalised and emotionalised lay-style narratives about a blonde, fair-skinned girl at Moria (2020). In the case of Ukrainian refugees (2022), all media narratives were also found in the political debate. Thus, while a few narratives were ignored by the political debate, we found no cases of explicit rejection in our three case studies. But the political debate also introduced narratives not found in the media, i.e., narratives launched by opposition parties on the federal level and regional politicians of government parties, which cast the German government as villain (and sometimes also migrants) with the German people as victims of an unfettered influx of migrants; as far as we were able to determine, the media reported on these positions but did not embrace the narratives.

In the coordinative sphere, the three case studies revealed a more differentiated picture. In the case of the 'migration crisis' of 2015, policy-making documents embraced narratives found in the communicative sphere, even retaining their lay-style. Specifically, the narratives embraced by the government in the communicative sphere were also embedded in policy-making documents authored by the coalition government parties; inasmuch as the policy-making process in Germany also involves non-governing parties with parliamentary representation, their communicative-sphere narratives were embraced at the policy-making level. However, none of the regional political debate was found to be embraced or adapted at the federal level policy-making.

In the case of Moria in 2020, policy-making documents embraced all the main narratives found in the communicative sphere, including some that cast the EU, Europe, European governments as villains. Some political actors saw the humanitarian catastrophe as a symptom of the larger failure in migration policy and used the events to propose a fundamental change in policy, while other political actors insisted on treating the events as an exceptional catastrophe that should be met only with exceptional, one-time humanitarian measures. Such distinct narratives with diverging morals (and thus policy proposals) were found not only with opposition parties but also within the governing parties, and thus were embraced in documents involved in the policy-making process.

In the case of Ukrainian refugees, the coordinative sphere embraced narratives from the communicative sphere or adapted them by dropping the villain character. In all cases, however, these narratives were transformed into a technocratic style: highly personalised, emotionalised characters and plots became general and abstract in documents focused on the administrative handling of refugees. No conflicting narratives or diverging morals were found in the relevant policy-making documents. Due to the policy-level separation of migration and military spending, military aid-related narratives from the communicative sphere would not be embraced in the documents we analysed.

It is significant that there is such a strong convergence between media and political debates regarding migration narratives in Germany, given that they constitute two distinct social fields. In contrast, there is comparatively little overlap between political debates and policy-making, which are seen as part of the same social field (politics). In short, our study of migration narratives empirically substantiates the assumption of a communicative sphere comprising media and public political debate and a coordinative sphere.

On a more abstract level, we noted that the level of consensus/controversy can differ significantly between the communicative and the coordinative sphere. Within our analyses, this pattern was not the same across cases. While the 2015 and 2020 case studies showed more controversy in general, in the former the communicative sphere (specifically political debates) was far more conflictual than the coordinative sphere; in 2020, the opposite pattern was found. Finally, in the case of Ukrainian refugees, there was overall consensus in both spheres.

We also noted that opposition parties will act differently than government parties in the coordinative sphere, not just because they embrace different narratives but because they treat it like an extension of the communicative sphere: opposition parties tend to use lay-style narratives more frequently, and they tend to cast the government as villains, deriving different morals for policy-making.

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