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SPREADING THE COSTS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Executive Summary:

Increases in the numbers of asylum-seekers in Europe have generated concerns within states about imbalances in the costs borne by different regions. Germany and the UK have responded by introducing systems of dispersal of asylum-seekers between Länder or regions to help redistribute the costs of reception. Dispersal has also aimed to reduce the social tensions generated by the concentration of asylum-seekers in particular areas, to deter potential applicants, and – in the case of Germany – to exercise closer control over asylum-seekers.

An analysis of German and UK policies suggests that dispersal has had mixed success in realising these goals:

1. Redistribution of costs: The German system is effective in redistributing both financial and social costs on the basis of the population of different Länder. However, the failure of the distribution criteria to take into account differentials in per capita income creates a disproportionate burden for poorer regions. In the UK, problems with the structure and implementation of the new arrangements have so far failed to relieve pressure on the South East as much as intended, although some of the difficulties may be transitional.
2. Reducing social tensions: In both countries dispersal may have helped reduce tensions in areas from which asylum-seekers are dispersed, but it has created far greater problems in new receiving areas.
3. Deterrence and control: There is no evidence that dispersal has had a deterrent effect. In Germany, where dispersal is combined with restrictions on free movement, it may facilitate the return of rejected applicants; however, the severity of these measures probably results in a greater number of 'disappearances' of asylum-seekers.

Dispersal also has a substantial impact on the rights and welfare of asylum-seekers, impeding access to community and social support and legal assistance, and in many cases making asylum-seekers more vulnerable to racist abuse. The increased social marginalisation of asylum-seekers resulting from dispersal may also have negative repercussions for race relations in general.

Drawing on this analysis, the report suggests a number of improvements to dispersal policies:

1. Germany should consider distributing asylum-seekers on the basis of income differentials between different Länder, rather than on the basis of population levels; alternatively, it could provide government grants for developing reception facilities in poorer Länder.
2. The UK could examine options for decentralising the National Asylum Support System (NASS) and enhancing the role of regional asylum consortia.
3. NASS and German Länder authorities should develop and implement a policy of dispersal to 'cluster areas' within regions or Länder.

4. Both countries could benefit from more extensive EU provisions for financial burden-sharing, possibly in the form of a fund distributed to sub-national regions to help spread costs and develop reception facilities.

-ENDS-

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notes to the editor

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notes to editors

1. The Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society was established in 1973. The Foundation is an independent bilateral body which funds comparative research and sponsors British-German events in the economic, industrial, environmental and social policy field in both countries.
2. Review and reference copies of the report are available from the Anglo-German Foundation

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