

The Silent Mass Immigration: Family Reunification in the EU in the Light of Recent Data

Introduction

Family reunification could be seen as a discrete and legal, yet demographically subversive mass immigration. While national and European laws, despite discrepancies, recognize the immigrants' right to family reunification, law is far from grasping the complexity of the family reunification problem. One such extra-legal aspect is whitewashing illegal migration, and the German case demonstrates this aspect the best. In March 2016, the German government suspended family reunifications for migrants with subsidiary protection for two years. This occurred in the aftermath of the 2015 migrant crisis as hundreds of thousands of people entered Germany illegally. The German government announced that the bill of suspension was intended "to slow down the influx of refugees arriving from besieged areas in the Middle East".¹ That is to say, the German government wished to control a chaotic and illegal situation, by avoiding granting a legal status (family reunification) for migrants who entered illegally. In August 2018 Germany, now in control of the influx of illegal migrants, resumed family reunifications for refugees with a limited protection status, with some 34,000 reunification requests in 2018 and a monthly 1000 family members to be accepted.²

In the following, we shall present some recent data on the family reunification in the EU, focusing on France and Germany, the two major and largely affected countries in the Union. Subsequently, we will explore some of the implications of this silent and radical change in the social-cultural map of Europe.

1. The EU and immigrant families

Family reunification is the second source of immigration to the EU after employment, and is increasing steadily. In 2017 the highest number of first residence permits in the EU-28 was issued for employment-related reasons (1.01 million or 32.2% of all first permits issued),

¹ Family reunification for refugees resumes in Germany <https://www.dw.com/en/family-reunification-for-refugees-resumes-in-germany/a-44903743> (last accessed 20-03-2019).

² *Idem*.

followed by family-related reasons (**830.000 or 26.5%**), while education-related reasons (530.000 or 16.9%). This is an increase in delivered permits for family reunification compared to 2016 by 49.000 or 6.3%.³ Eurostat also asserts that “Germany (157.000), Spain (126.000), Italy (113.000), the United Kingdom (101.000), and France (93.000) were the EU Member States with the highest number of first residence permits issued for family-related reasons in 2017”; it adds that “family-related reasons were the most common reason for issuing residence permits in 10 of the Member States (all situated in Western Europe) and in three of these — Italy, Spain and Belgium — family-related reasons accounted for more than half of all the permits issued”.⁴

That is to say, legal immigration to Western Europe is primarily a matter of family immigration. This type of migration seems to be reproductive of communities as family reunification in Germany, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom and France are all linked to particular immigrant communities from Turkey, North and West Africa and the Indian sub-continent.

With regard to migrants who are granted an asylum status, the most recent data provided by Eurostat shows that Belgium and France stand among the highest countries to have delivered permits of family reunification with a beneficiary of protection status as Belgium delivered 11.471 permits in 2017, while France delivered 21.354 permits in 2016.⁵

As far as the major source countries of family reunification in the EU are concerned, in terms of the percentage of family reunification in the residence permits of their citizens obtained in 2017, these countries stand on the top of the list: Morocco (67%), Turkey (41.5%), Brazil (37.7%), India (34.3%), Syria (27.3%) and Iraq (22.1%).⁶ In terms of numbers, “Moroccan (72.000), Syrian (61.000) and Indian citizens (56.000) were the largest groups receiving residence permits for family-related reasons”.⁷ If the current tendency

³ Residence permits statistics
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Residence_permits_statistics#First_residence_permits_by_reason (last accessed 20-03-2019).

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ Permits valid at the end of the year for family reunification with a beneficiary of protection status
http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_resfrps2&lang=en (last accessed 20-03-2019).

⁶ Top countries whose citizens received first residence permits in the EU-28 by reason, 2017
[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/7/7d/Top_10_countries_whose_citizens_received_first_residence_permits_in_the_EU-28_by_reason%2C_2017_\(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/7/7d/Top_10_countries_whose_citizens_received_first_residence_permits_in_the_EU-28_by_reason%2C_2017_(%25).png) (last accessed 20-03-2019).

⁷ Residence permits statistics.

remains, this means that family reunification from only Morocco, Syria and India will bring almost 2 million people to the EU in the next ten years.

2. Family reunification in France

France delivered more than 520.000 residence permits for family reunification in the period between 2012 and 2017. The data published by the ministry of Interior shows a relatively stable pattern over the years:

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (est.)
87,170	93,714	92,326	90,113	89,124	91,070

Source: The French Ministry of Interior⁸

In France family reunification is the first source of immigration. In 2017 it surpassed, by far, employment (27,690 residence permits) and humanitarian permits (40,305). Family reunification is only rivaled recently by residence permits delivered to students (88,095).⁹ Recent estimations by the French Ministry of Interior published in January 2019 show that the number of residence permits for family reunification for 2018 is expected to reach 89,185, which is not yet a final number.¹⁰

As part of family reunification three categories of family members obtained residence permit: family members of French citizens (born in France or acquired the French citizenship); family members of immigrants with residence permit in France; or those having personal and family links in France. To take the figures of 2017, the first category obtained the highest number of residence permits (52,110), which probably indicates the persistence of endogenous marriage despite being French (by citizenship). Next, is the second category with 23,230 residence permits delivered for family members of immigrants, and finally 15,730

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Residence_permits_statistics#First_residence_permits_by_citizenship (last accessed 20-03-2019)

⁸ Chiffres clés / Essentiel de l'immigration / Statistiques

<https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/content/download/107304/852017/file/EM-2018-11-les-titres-de-sejour-au-16-janvier-2018.pdf> (last accessed 20-03-2019)

⁹ *Idem*

¹⁰ Les titres de séjour, publication du 15 janvier 2019.

<https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/content/download/114405/915610/file/La-delivrance-des-premiers-titres-de-sejour-par-famille-de-motifs.xls> (last accessed 20-03-2019).

residence permits for „personal and family links” in France. The latter is a loose category; it includes: humanitarian considerations / exceptional reasons, humanitarian or exceptional motives and residency 10 years, minor becoming major, residence in France for 10 years or 15 years for students, outstanding talent / service to the community, and private and family life.¹¹ Needless to say that a large range of reasons can fit into these categories.

It should come as no surprise that family reunification is the subject of a major public debate in France. An Ifop survey published in the conservative weekly *Valeurs actuelles*, at the end of April 2016, revealed “that a majority of French people (59%) were in favor of the abolition of family reunification. The most hostile opinions to family reunification are in the ranks of sympathizers of the National Front (now called National Rally; 92%) and the Republicans (73%). On the other hand, 75% of supporters of the Left Front and 64% of the Socialist Party supporters are in favour of family reunification.”¹²

For decades, center-right and far right parties put the abolition of family reunification on the political agenda, without succeeding, so far. Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, president of *Debout la France*, “has long defended a two-year moratorium on family reunification. The National Front, for its part, went further by pleading for a total elimination of family reunification. The majority of right politicians propose to toughen the conditions of family reunification, and Nicolas Sarkozy, in 2016, wanted to suspend it”.¹³

Nicholas Sarkozy made a notable declaration in 2016, in which he justified his intention to suspend family reunification in case he was to be elected as president in 2017 as it follows:

“No one anticipated the consequences that family reunification would have on the entry into the territory, the integration difficulties that would ensue and the significant difference in birth rates in newly arrived families. As a direct result, a declining integration, a problem in housing construction and the formation of suburbs becoming community ghettos followed. For 40 years, family reunification has been the subject of massive fraud and misuse of procedures, despite attempts to limit it.... family reunification has become an almost unconditional right, generating strong tensions in terms of employment, housing, access to education in our country, and

¹¹ Chiffres clés / Essentiel de l'immigration / Statistiques
<https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/content/download/107304/852017/file/EM-2018-11-les-titres-de-sejour-au-16-janvier-2018.pdf> (last accessed 20-03-2019).

¹² Regroupement familial: 59% des Français contre
<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2016/04/20/97001-20160420FILWWW00024-des-francais-opposes-au-regroupement-familial.php> (last accessed 20-03-2019)

¹³ Nicolas Sarkozy tape fort contre le regroupement familial
<http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2016/08/23/01016-20160823ARTFIG00187-nicolas-sarkozy-tape-fort-contre-le-regroupement-familial.php> (last accessed 20-03-2019).

threatening our social and national cohesion... as long as the new immigration policy will not be implemented at national or European level, family reunification should be suspended.”¹⁴

3. Family reunification in Germany

In 2016, Germany issued 505,000 first residence permits. It issued 137,000 residence permits for family reunification, making Germany the country in which the highest number of family reunification residence permits was delivered.¹⁵ Germany granted a total of 54,036 family reunification residence permits in 2010 and 82,440 in 2015. Although most of the residence permits were granted to wives or husbands and children, parents and other family members also benefited from it. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people will join those ca. 600,000 people who obtained the right to asylum or protection in Germany in 2015-2017.¹⁶

Between 2015 and 2018, the Federal Foreign Office delivered **322,107 family reunification visas**. According to this source, “the Foreign Office gave 72,681 visas for family reunification in 2015 and 103,883 in 2016. In 2017 117,992 and in the first quarter of 2018 27,551 visas were issued.¹⁷ The same source indicates that “from 2015 to 2018, the largest share (41.37 percent) of family reunification visas issued went to Syrians (108,739 visas) and Iraqis (24,521)”¹⁸. **This means that within the span of 10 years, a million migrants is expected to enter Germany legally with a visa of family reunification.**

Moreover, in addition to family reunification of immigrants with a German citizenship, or ong-term resident permits in Germany, the current situation of those who are entitled to asylum or protection is still legally in the process.¹⁹ The German government focused attention on “**the quota of 1000 persons per month**” as it had been agreed by the

¹⁴ Nicolas Sarkozy tape fort contre le regroupement familial
<http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2016/08/23/01016-20160823ARTFIG00187-nicolas-sarkozy-tape-fort-contre-le-regroupement-familial.php>(last accessed 20-03-2019)

¹⁵ Residence permits statistics
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Residence_permits_statistics (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

¹⁶ 100.000 oder doch sieben Millionen?
<https://faktenfinder.tagesschau.de/inland/familiennachzug-syrien-afd-107.html> (Last accessed on 10 May 2018)
 Familiennachzug: 150.000 bis 180.000 Ehepartner und Kinder von Geflüchteten mit Schutzstatus leben im Ausland
<https://www.iab-forum.de/familiennachzug-150-000-bis-180-000-ehepartner-und-kinder-von-gefluechteten-mit-schutzstatus-leben-im-ausland/> (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

¹⁷ 322.000x Familiennachzug seit 2015, Zweit- und Drittfrauen inklusive
<https://www.mmnews.de/politik/77565-322-000-visa-fuer-familiennachzug456> (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

¹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹ 322.000 Visa für Familiennachzug seit 2015 erteilt

two main German political parties present in the government coalition. However, their anti-immigration opposition, the AfD contests this quota by claiming that is “does not refer to the entire family reunification, but only to the relocation of dependents with subsidiary protection”.²⁰ That is to say, it does not cover those who are long time residents or granted citizenship.

With regard to Syrians, one of the major beneficiaries of the refugee status, and therefore of the family reunification procedure, “in 2017, the number of Syrians whose asylum application had been approved and were allowed to catch up with their families reached 267,500 people. In 2018, some **390,000 Syrians** were allowed to bring their families”.²¹ The number will double if not triple or quadruple, depending on the number of children or close relatives, as a result of family reunification, which led Daniel Freiherr von Lützow (AfD) to say: “390,000 Syrians can catch up with their families! If a man counts only 3 family members, that’s 1,170,000 newcomers.”²² Syria’s total fertility rate reached 2.5 children born/woman in 2017,²³ which could mean that an average Syrian family could count an espouse for 2 to 3 children (assuming no other relatives such as parents or minor siblings are included). A million or more of Syrians who enter Germany through family reunification, between 2015 and 2025, is not an exaggeration at all.

Similarly to the French public opinion, the Germans reject massively the family reunification as showed by a recent INSA survey commissioned by BILD in 2017 which found that 58.3 percent were against family reunification.²⁴ The survey also showed that “significantly more women (62.1 percent) than men (54.5 percent), significantly more East Germans (66.8 percent) than West Germans (56.5 percent) and significantly more middle-aged respondents from 40 to 49 Years (69.2 percent) as respondents between 18 and 29 years

<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article179017998/Aussenministerium-322-000-Visa-fuer-Familiennachzug-seit-2015-erteilt.html> (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

²⁰ Gauland: Kein Familiennachzug für subsidiär Schutzberechtigte!

<https://www.afdbundestag.de/gauland-kein-familiennachzug-fuer-subsidiaer-schutzberechtigte/> (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

²¹ Ab 2018 können 390.000 Syrer ihre Familien nach Deutschland holen

https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/antragsflut-fuer-familien-visa-fluechtlinge-ab-2018-koennen-390-000-syrer-ihre-familien-nach-deutschland-holen_id_7525769.html (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

²² Nebelkerzenwerfen beim Familiennachzug für Flüchtlinge

<https://dieunbestechlichen.com/2017/10/nebelkerzenwerfen-beim-familiennachzug-fuer-fluechtlinge/> (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

²³ Syria Total fertility rate

https://www.indexmundi.com/syria/total_fertility_rate.html (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

²⁴ Zahl liegt BILD exklusiv vor - 390 000 Syrer dürfen ihre Familien Nachholen

https://www.bild.de/.../merkel-beim-fluechtlingsgipfel-in-paris-53023774_bild.html (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

(49.1 percent) rejected family reunification”.²⁵ The survey revealed that the political orientation correlated with the attitude towards family reunification as “the voters of the AFD (95.8 percent) and the FDP (66.8 percent) rejected family reunion much more than the voters of the Christian Democratic Union (54.3 percent), the Left Party (52.2 percent), the SPD (42.7 percent) or those of the Greens (18.2 percent)”.²⁶

4. Family reunification and the demographic subversion

Taken in the short run, these numbers look massive. Yet, the EU’s reports on family reunification do not take into account the variables of culture and society. Family is the unit by which a society reproduces its norms. Thus, importing families means bringing in cultural codes and social actions by virtue of the identity principle. Immigrant communities promote their own cultural symbols, including gender relations, marriage, the perception of the West, etc.; the same as they show attachment to Islam as identity. These communities were educated in the post-colonial period in an exclusivist thought that saw in the West only imperialism, and this thought remains today at the very heart of Europe, among Muslim youth. These families do not want to deny their belonging to Islam, and somehow this is difficult if not impossible because migration cannot erase centuries of structures and codes embedded in people’s ideas and actions. The major challenge that Muslims pose to European cultures lies in the fact that they claim the right to Islamic family norms, while at the same time they want to settle in Europe.

Family reunification has many other aspects. Above all, as Europe faces the demographic decline, and many EU members adopt pro-natalist policies, family reunification comes as a demographic dumping or demographic making-up. European countries, especially France,²⁷ rely on immigration to increase or sustain the number of their populations, while actually immigration does not solve the initial demographic problem of the society at stake,

²⁵ Mehrheit der Deutschen lehnt Familiennachzug von Flüchtlingen ab
<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article168126248/Mehrheit-der-Deutschen-lehnt-Familiennachzug-von-Fluechtlingen-ab.html> (Last accessed on 20-03-2019)

²⁶ *Idem.*

²⁷ Recent data in France from 2018, indicates that « the number of births continues to fall in France, which remains despite all the most fertile country of the EU with 1,87 child per women. In 2018, 758,000 babies were born in France. That’s 12,000 fewer than in 2017 and 60,000 less than in 2014». See :
Le nombre de naissances continue de baisser en France, qui reste malgré tout le pays le plus fécond de l’UE
https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/01/15/le-nombre-de-naissances-continue-de-baisser-en-france-qui-reste-malgre-tout-le-pays-le-plus-fecond-de-l-ue_5409337_3224.html (last accessed 20-03-2019)

but establishes a new community, as human groups are not car spare parts, but organic elements. The new community is organically linked to its country of origin while only mechanically connected to the European society, especially in the era of globalisation.

Consequently, an inevitable demographic conflict is at work. The rivalry between families of Muslim background and native families in Europe is both social and cultural. As newcomers are generally poorer, less educated and dependent on social security, as well as on quantifying their social status (the more members of the group there are, the more resources they can acquire), multiplying children make their status stronger from a legal point of view; this could be a social blackmailing tool. Even more, social rivalry takes place between different migrant communities, and between families, as the one that has more children, especially boys, enjoys a better status in the community. Competition extends, as an implication of the social rivalry, to culture, as the latter is the way we express our social action and give meaning to it. Muslim norms emphasize traditional values (which boost the demographic growth), while current Western cultures emphasize freedom, pleasure, individuality, and generally secular-rational values (as shown by the Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map).²⁸ Cultural competition correlates with the rejection of the Western cultures, by immigrant communities from the Muslim world and Africa, which perceive in arranged and endogenous marriages (eg. Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men), ways of reproduction and distinction from Western societies.

Finally, family reunification makes migration a repeated cycle of first generation migrations waves. Not only has family reunification nurtured the migrant communities with distinctive social and cultural mechanisms, contributing to the “status of perpetual first generation”,²⁹ by the transfer of loyalties, languages and customs, but it also disrupts any process of integration or assimilation in the long run of third or fourth generation descendants of migrations. This goes well beyond cultural and social conflicts, and will be reflected in politics as well.

²⁸ Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map

<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSCContents.jsp?CMSID=Findings> (last accessed 20-03-2019)

²⁹ Samim Akgönül, “Perpetual First Generation”: Religiosity and Territoriality in Belonging Strategies of Turks of France”, in: *Exploring the Multitude of Muslims in Europe: Essays in Honour of Jørgen S. Nielsen*, Eds. Niels Valdemar Vinding and Jørgen Schøler Nielsen, Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2018, p. 68.

Conclusions

In sum, the massive numbers of family reunification entries should be taken seriously on three levels. On the first level, being an abused right, law should be adapted to meet the new challenges whereby family reunification is (mis)used as a safe and legal “migration route”. Second, although decision-makers in the EU are quite confident that family reunification brings a work force and consumers, it is unreasonable to assume that people come identity-less, or without social and cultural norms, which they wish to perpetuate in Europe, through family life. A clash of cultures is inevitable in terms of gender, children, education and social cohesion.³⁰ Third, family reunification is an inappropriate answer to Europe’s demographics, bringing in a new society and unsettling the ongoing pro-natalist policies.

³⁰ A nők jogai és helyzete egyes migráns közösségek nyugatitól eltérő civilizációs háttére tükrében https://www.migraciokutato.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Nők-jogai-és-helyzete_MKI_elemezés.pdf (last accessed 20-03-2019)