

Greece, Portugal, Spain and the East European states take on less than their fair share of responsibility for EU asylum seekers.

Blog Admin

*One of the stated aims of the “2008 Policy Plan on Asylum” by the European Commission is increased ‘responsibility sharing’ between Member States with respect to asylum seekers. **Luc Bovens** and **Günperi Sisman** assess the extent to which UNHCR outcome data reflect these aims between 2006 and 2011 – from the end of the first phase of the Common European Asylum System until the latest available data. They find that Greece, Portugal and Spain take on very low responsibility for asylum seekers per capita and per unit of GDP. Eastern European states do poorly per capita, but do much better per unit of GDP. There is also an overall trend towards greater responsibility sharing for acceptances and stocks per unit of GDP.*



What would it mean to have equal responsibility sharing among the EU member states in asylum issues? One ideal would be for the per capita burden to be equal across Member States. We might expect, for instance, that more populous states take on greater responsibility than less populous states in registering applications, awarding refugee status or subsidiary protection (‘acceptances’), and harbouring refugees (‘stocks’) in their territories. An alternative (somewhat more reasonable) ideal would be that states with higher GDP take on greater responsibility. We study the UNHCR Statistics between 2006 and 2011 to examine the extent to which these expectations have been met and whether there has been progress over this period.



Unequal responsibility sharing per capita

If there is equal responsibility sharing per capita then the number of applications to each state should be proportional to the population size of that state. Reality is far from this ideal.

In our study we order states according to the number of applications per capita. We identify a ‘low responsibility block’ incorporating Portugal and Spain and the Eastern European states. These countries contain 32 per cent of the EU’s population, but register only 5 per cent of applications. We also identify a ‘high responsibility block’ made up of Malta and Cyprus, which contain 0.2 per cent of the population, but register 2.8 per cent of applications. In between, we identify a ‘middle responsibility block’, with all other EU states, constituting 68 per cent of the population, and registering 92 per cent of applications.

The pattern is roughly similar for acceptances and stocks with two exceptions: namely, Greece drops down into the low responsibility block and Cyprus drops down into the middle responsibility block. The Eastern European states plus Spain, Portugal and Greece are in the low responsibility block with 34 per cent of the population, registering 5 per cent of acceptances and hosting 3 per cent of stocks. Malta is alone in the high responsibility block with 0.08 per cent of the population, registering 1.2 per cent of acceptances and hosting 0.3 per cent of stocks. All other states are in the middle responsibility block with 66 per cent of the population, registering 93.5 per cent of acceptances and hosting 97 per cent of stocks.

Unequal responsibility sharing per unit of GDP

If there is equal responsibility sharing per unit of GDP then the number of applications to each state should be proportional to the GDP of that state. Let us look at some figures.

The Eastern European states combined with Portugal and Spain register 5 per cent of the applications. These countries represent 32 per cent of the EU population, but their GDP is only 18 per cent of EU GDP. The low responsibility is mainly due to Portugal and Spain, carrying a meagre 1.25 per cent of the applications for 10.2 per cent of GDP, whereas the Eastern European states carry a respectable 4 per cent of the applications for 7.4 per cent of GDP.

The Eastern European states combined with Portugal, Spain and Greece carry 5 per cent of the acceptances. These countries represent 34 per cent of the EU population, but their GDP is only 20 per cent of EU GDP. Again, the low responsibility is mainly due to Portugal, Spain and Greece, carrying only 0.83 per cent of the acceptances for 12.1 per cent of GDP and is not due to the Eastern European states: they carry as much as 4 per cent of the applications for 7.4 per cent of GDP. As for stocks, we see the same pattern. The Eastern European states jointly with Portugal, Spain and Greece register 2.6 per cent of the stocks for 20 per cent of GDP. Portugal, Spain and Greece account for 0.5 per cent of the stocks for 12.1 per cent of GDP, whereas the Eastern European states carry 2.14 per cent of the stocks for 7.4 per cent of GDP.

When we focus on responsibility sharing per unit of GDP, then the situation does not exactly become perfect, but there is less inequality than when we assess responsibility sharing per capita. Low responsibility states per capita tend to be poorer states and so their lighter burdens are warranted on grounds of proportionality per unit of GDP. Granted, Portugal, Spain and Greece still carry extremely light burdens relative to GDP, but the burdens of Eastern European states are more in line with their GDP.

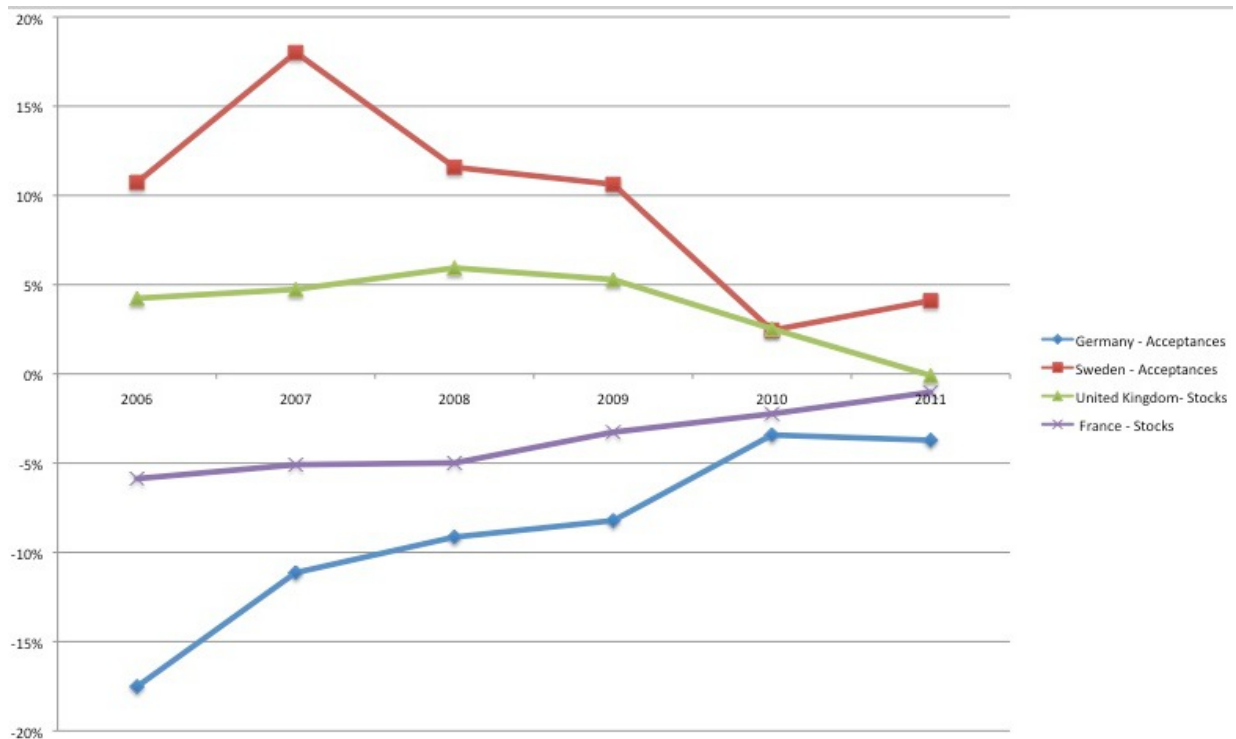
Is there a trend toward more equal sharing of responsibility?

A measure of the degree of unequal responsibility sharing is the [Gini coefficient](#). We tracked the yearly progression of the Gini coefficients from 2006 to 2011 measuring inequality in responsibility sharing relative to population and relative to GDP for applications, acceptances and stocks. The only clear one-directional trends we could identify are toward greater equality in responsibility sharing relative to GDP for acceptances and stocks. To identify what is driving these trends, we calculated whether individual states took on a greater or smaller share of responsibility relative to their GDP.

For acceptances, the trend toward greater equality is (mainly) due to Sweden and Germany. Sweden used to register an excess of acceptances relative to their share of GDP (e.g. 18 per cent above their share in 2007) and Germany used to register a deficit of acceptances relative to their share of GDP (e.g. 18 per cent below their share in 2006). However in recent years their acceptances grew roughly proportional to their share of GDP.

For stocks, the trend toward greater equality is (mainly) due to the UK and France as illustrated by Figure 1. The UK used to register an excess of stocks relative to their share of GDP (as much as 6 per cent above their share in 2008). France used to register a deficit of stocks relative their share of GDP (e.g. 6 per cent below their share in 2006). But UK stocks have decreased and French stocks have increased and are now roughly proportional to their share of GDP.

Figure 1: Percentage of acceptances or stocks minus percentage of GDP



Conclusion

Arguably, it is more reasonable to measure responsibility sharing relative to GDP than to population. After all, the share of the asylum burden a state can carry is foremost determined by its capacity to cover processing costs, by its labour market and social security system, rather than its population size. Our main findings for 2006-2011 are that first, Greece, Portugal and Spain take on very low responsibility per capita as well as per unit of GDP. Second, Eastern European countries take on very low responsibility per capita, but this is much less pronounced per unit of GDP. Finally, there has been an overall trend towards greater equality in responsibility sharing for acceptances (due to changing patterns in Germany and Sweden) and stocks (due to changing patterns in the UK and France).

For a longer discussion of the topic covered in this article, see: [Luc Bovens, Chlump Chatkupt and Laura Smead \(2012\) 'Measuring common standards and equal responsibility sharing in EU asylum outcome data' European Union Politics, 13 \(1\), pp. 70-93.](#)

This research was supported by a grant from [STICERD](#).

[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/10FWOxn>

About the authors

Luc Bovens - *LSE, Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method*

Luc Bovens is the Head of the Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method at the LSE and a Deputy Director of the LSE Migration Studies Unit. His main areas of research are moral and political philosophy, philosophy of economics, philosophy of public policy, Bayesian epistemology, rational choice theory, and voting theory.



-

Günperi Sisman

Günperi Sisman is a Research Analyst at the London School of Economics. She is a recent Master's graduate from the School, with a specialization in International Relations of the European Union. She holds a B.A. in International Studies from the American University, Washington DC.

