

THE SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FORCED MIGRATION

A Multi-Media Educational Tool

Winter 2021

Challenges of German Bureaucracy for Syrian Refugees

Target audience: advanced and life-long learners

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Research by Ellis Peterson (Vassar College)

German bureaucracy has become notorious – while it serves as a frequent source of cheeky political humor in German media and popular culture, it also poses a very serious dilemma for many immigrants and asylum seekers attempting to resettle within the country’s borders. A team of six Syrian refugees even created an app to help other asylum seekers navigate the complex and confusing bureaucratic elements of migration. Because forcibly displaced Syrians compose a majority of recent asylum seekers in Germany, they have encountered a unique intersection of bureaucratic over-complication and conflicting cultural and political attitudes towards immigrants and asylum seekers. Thus, this section will focus on their experiences.

In online interviews and written accounts, numerous Syrian refugees have attested that the bureaucratic obstacles they encountered in Germany were less easily surmountable than many cultural, religious, and even sometimes language barriers. In several of the sources below, interviewees describe many of the ways in which the processes for obtaining important resources and documents such as housing, work visas, and licenses. Restrictions on employment options, prevent them from permanently settling into a community, and even preclude them from efficiently completing language classes. These accounts, combined with medical studies, research on policy and integration, and examinations of changing political positions, demonstrate that the impacts of bureaucratic hurdles are more pervasive and lasting than they might appear. Bureaucracy isn’t simply more difficult to navigate than the cultural challenges of migration; it exacerbates many of those difficulties and adds fuel to xenophobic and anti-refugee sentiment.

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However, the situation in Germany isn't entirely bleak. Refugees themselves have made significant strides in lessening the toll taken by bureaucratic procedures and paradoxes, and numerous researchers are identifying policy changes with the potential to drastically improve the resettlement process for many asylum-seekers.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES FACED BY ASYLUM SEEKERS IN GERMANY

Read: Wendy Pearlman, "[Culture or Bureaucracy? Challenges in Syrian Refugees' Initial Incorporation in Germany](#)," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, March 2017.

Read: Lily Hindy, "[Germany's Syrian Refugee Integration Experiment](#)," *The Century Foundation*, September 6, 2018.

Read: Bruce Katz, Luise Noring, and Nantke Garrelts, "[Cities and Refugees: The German Experience](#)," *Brookings*, September 16, 2018.

Guiding Question:

- How do Germany's immigration system and structure of government shape the bureaucratic processes involved in integration?

HOW BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES INTERSECT WITH AND IMPACT CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, EMPLOYMENT, AND OTHER CHALLENGES

Read and watch: "[German Bureaucracy Keeps Refugees Out of Job Market, Report Finds](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, June 18, 2018 (includes video).

Read: Julika Loss, Yamen Aldoughle, Alexandra Sauter, and Julia von Sommoggy. "['Wait and Wait. That is the Only Thing They Can Say': A Qualitative Study Exploring Experiences of Immigrated Syrian Doctors Applying for Medical License in Germany](#)," *BMC Health Services Research*, (23 April 2020)

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Read and watch: Guy Chazan, "[A Syrian Refugee in Germany: The Battle with Bureaucracy](#)," *Financial Times*, October 25, 2016 (includes video)

Watch: "[Syrian Refugees After 5 years in Germany | DW Documentary](#)," *Deutsche Welle*, September 3, 2020 (video)

Read: Yvonne Muther, "[Despite Early Optimism, German Companies Hire Few Refugees](#)," *National Public Radio*, August 28, 2016

Guiding Questions:

- What do interviewees describe as the biggest hurdles to gaining asylum/integrating into German culture and society?
- In what ways do bureaucratic requirements exacerbate the disruptive effects of forced displacement? How does bureaucracy shape or contribute to expectations and experiences with processes like assimilation?

HOW BUREAUCRATIC COMPLICATIONS INFLUENCE ANTI-REFUGEE ATTITUDES

Read: Katrin Elgar and Asia Haidar, "[Why Most Syrian Refugees Want to Stay in Germany](#)," *Spiegel International*, July 3, 2019

Read: Ruairi Casey, "[The Two Contrasting Sides of German Refugee Policy](#)," *The New Humanitarian*, November 11, 2019

Guiding Questions

- After reading the two pieces above, can you imagine other ways in which bureaucratic hurdles contribute to refugee stereotyping?
- Why do you think some people accept or perpetuate anti-refugee sentiment? Can you think of ways to deconstruct and debunk these beliefs with simple, accessible explanations?

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POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Read: Aula Abbara, Diana Rayes, Maryam Omar, et al. "[Overcoming Obstacles Along the Pathway to Integration for Syrian Healthcare Professionals in Germany,](#)" *BMJ Glob Health*, August 26, 2019

Read: Philip Oltermann, "[Syrian Refugees Design App for Navigating German Bureaucracy,](#)" *The Guardian*, August 5, 2016

Guiding Questions

- This is a complex problem without simple fixes, but can you imagine other ways to alleviate the burden of bureaucratic processes and requirements? What other elements of asylum-seeking and migration could benefit from such an app?
- Considering the piece on integration for Syrian healthcare professionals, how could that concept translate to other industries? What kinds of actions could hasten or improve this integration?