

# How you can impact the refugee crisis...

Get involved and redefine Germanys future!

It is no secret that Germany is in the middle of a huge immigration crisis, which is leaving two possible outcomes. Option one, Germany cannot handle the financial, cultural, political, religious and social conflicts within the newly formed “melting pot”, which leads to a radicalization of sides until the whole country goes up in flames. Or, all Germans could come together for common goal, integrating the peacefully minded refugees to turn this crisis into a chance. A chance for Germany to grow.



The huge in-poring of immigrants in the last years has let to many different issues, inspiring new ways of tackling and overcoming them.

Angela Merkel’s decision in 2015 to open Germanys borders to the fleeing immigrants from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Albania was and is the first focus of any discussion around the refugee crisis. A strong voice on the anti- refugee front is Germanys right wing party, the AFD. An article on their website showcases their Federal Executive Alice Weidel’s opinion: Germany first!

This thought in itself is not fully negative, since the health of Germanys economy is the very reason, why it was able to accept so many refugees in the first place. But even so, it is hard to deny at this point, that many refuges are and will become part of Germany. Parties calling for kicking immigrants out of Germany or keeping all immigrants no matter their criminal record might fail to see the issue in a realistic light. Extreme political parties such as the NPD (Nationale Partei Deutschland), the AFD (Alternative für Deutsche) and “die Linke” often offer only such one sided and one-dimensional approaches.

This is a political issue, which is calling for politically and active problem solver. The German website “Edition F” states: “(...) you quickly get to the point, where the interest simply is not enough. What counts now is real commitment.”

There are many different ways of becoming politically active. The easiest way to do so? *Petitions*. Not only can they bring likeminded people together and form strong communities but start crucial conversations around big issues. Good website to start a petition are “Avaaz”, “Campact” or “Change.org”.

Secondly, there are many different political *parties to join* and become actively involved with. Often times joining a party can be done online and includes a monthly membership fee between 5 and 250 euro. If not sure, it is often possible to become a “guest member” first. They offer the opportunity to attend monthly “Stammtisch” meetings. Those meetings are a great way to becoming a voice of your community.

So what if no party represents your interests? *Start your own party*. To do so, 3 people are required to build the Board of Directors. The following steps are mostly of bureaucratic nature, and include coming up with a catchy slogan that describes the idea of the party.

Then there is a statute, in which the name, the seat of the party and the field of activity is specified, as well as an Organigram, the structure of the party and very basic information, such as new members in the party can be hired. To make your concerns and goals clear, it still needs a party program, which is voted on in a general meeting. Once done, you should have at least seven members in order to register in the club register and make the party final. The most important part is to stay active and beginning to involve more people.

An easier way to get involved in the process of implementing change are *panels, demonstrations and clubs or society's*. Public discussion panels can be found in every big city, especially at university's and college's. There are many social networks, organizing demonstrations. Which currently take place in Berlin can be read every day very comfortably in the Newsletter of the “Tagesspiegel”. Additionally, every city or town has clubs, tackling big subjects such as the education system or the immigration of refugees.



Finally, the private engagement should not be underestimated. Challenging oneself to a political discussion with someone of the “opposite side” does not only challenge perspectives but has the ability to unify over common goals and values. This unification can prevent strong

mindful people of becoming extremists and not being able to make considerate decisions, taking all elements and factors into account.

The political differences are the base, but not the entirety of the refugee crisis. Since Germany has already a recorded number of 970.400 refugees (End of 2017), the life together with immigrants and refugees has to be mastered and talked about as well.

The first obvious issue is the language barrier. Refugees often speak Arabic, Amharic or Kurdish. There are many institutes offering German courses, such as the "Goethe- Institute" and the "VHS". But this is not just a task for big organizations to take on. Every German-speaker can get involved in the learning and teaching process.

The little town "Nachrodt-Wiblingwerde" is an example for how Germans can become frontiers in the immigration process. Retired teachers and average volunteers offer German courses in the local kindergarten building. This offers the retired teacher generation to pass on their knowledge and experience, while the refugees have a direct contact person helping with the learning process. The initiative is financially supported by donations and local sponsors.

The town "Dörverden" shows a similar story. Retired teachers have come together to teach Refugees from Morocco, Albania, Somalia, Algeria and Eritrea German. They have support from the local church which, among other things, co-financed the acquisition of the required learning materials. "Those who participate here learn voluntarily and want to tackle their new life and integrate. It is a great opportunity for the refugees, and they know that too," explained teacher Dörte Niehaus.



And then there are the individual stories. Student Betsy (23 years old) from Rostock for example was asked by a friend, if she could teach a young boy from Syria German. She agreed and met with him every week, preparing fun games and lessons. Not only did she earn a little bit of money on the side but was able to use this experience as part of her study in "special school education". She now says: "I liked the little one very much and became friends with his mother."

Apart from the Language, Religion is another point of concern and often seems like a bridge impossible to cross. Many of the Refugees are Islamic, believing in the laws and values of the Koran. But it is not just a matter of what God to believe in. The Islamic religion is very intertwined with the refugee's culture and way of life.

Big focal points are the position of woman in society, ways of dressing, daily prayer, dispensing of alcohol and pork meet, as well as a general respect for elders and authorities. These differences are not to be underestimated, as they are very hard to overcome for many people. However, there are Chance for Germans to get to know the refugees culture and to learn of some of the values it might contribute to their own.

The CJD (Christliches Jugenddorfwerk Deutschlands e. V.) for example offers Seminars, where these differences can be learned and talked about. Those Seminars are targeted to everyone, who in some way or another is in contact with immigrants. Points of discussion are: "My encounter with the stranger – reflection", "Information about the Islamic religion", "Proximity and distance", "Exchange of experience and discussion". Such a Seminar takes two days and costs around 200 euro.

Churches are often a central point of encounter between Germans and Refugees. Pastor Erich Ackermann stated in an interview: "It is already a biblical commandment: You should love the stranger, as yourself, you should stand by him and that is an important commandment, which we also try to realize". He was involved in organizing a so called "Begegnungsfest" (English: encounter celebration) with approximately 200 refugees.



To achieve a real working integration, Refugees do not only have to feel accepted and understood but need work. Refugees are often highly motivated to start working but are restricted by the language barrier or the nature of their staying permit. Still, German business owner now have the opportunity and responsibility to choose, how they want to support the integration process.

"The qualified refugees and immigrants are a blessing for Germany, because they can significantly alleviate the demographic shortage of skilled workers. Any company that has problems with young talent should therefore also consider taking on workers with a migration

background / refugees, "explains a spokesman for the Cologne Chamber of Commerce on request of the" world ".

However, there are certain things employer must know. As a general rule: Refugees who have been registered in Germany for more than three months may also work here subject to their conditions. For example, foreigners from non-EU countries granted asylum on humanitarian or political grounds, are also granted a residence permit. Refugees who have been registered in Germany for less than three months, must leave the country or will soon be deported are not allowed to work.

Additionally, there are a number of government funding opportunities for companies that want to employ refugees. Those are for example the "Eingliederungszuschuss" (EGZ) and the "Einstiegsqualifizierung" (EQ). The refugee himself can in the case of wanting to start working or extending his education apply for financial support too.

Finally, all acts of violence against Refugees in Germany need to be ended, to ensure a peaceful coexisting in the future. The German newspaper „Tagesschau.de“has reported 704 political motivated attacks towards asylum seekers. This number entails assaults in and out of Refugee homes and caused 120 wounded. The offenses include assault, arson, property damage, insults, rabble- rousing and others.

The possibilities to help refugees are manifold. But the coordination of volunteering is chaotic in many places, helpers do not know where to get the most and who to turn to. It can be quite simple: Who wants to help, goes best to a facility in his immediate vicinity. The home operators can usually arrange contacts with church congregations, associations and citizens' initiatives, which in turn coordinate the individual help offers for the people in the refugee institutions. As a rule, there are offers in the areas of language promotion, leisure activities, accompaniment and sponsorships. There are regular planning meetings. In many places, there are additional integration cafés where refugees and helpers can come into contact.



In conclusion, there are many ways for Germans to get involved.

On tagesschau.de one can call up an interactive map of Germany, on which projects and initiatives are marked, which help refugees. Thus, the "Frankfurt Freifunker" provide refugees in emergency accommodation with Wi-Fi, and the association "Save me" from Greifswald is looking for godparents who support refugees after their arrival in Germany. At the football club "Leipzig United F.C." Children and adolescents from refugee families play soccer together with German children. Online platforms like "fluechtlinge-willkommen.de" or "ichhelfe.jetzt" provide more help over the internet.

As big as the problem might be, the individual proactive attitude is vital. Just as political decisions are made of individual votes, every initiative to reach out is building a stronger network between Germans and refugees.

As the discussion around refugees and Angela Merkel's foreign policy heats up, extreme oppositions to the idea of a full immigration of peacefully- minded refugees arise. It is important to never radicalize such an impactful decision. In short: criminal active refugees should face a trial of deportation and harmless refugees should be given a chance to build a life in Germany.

This whole progress can only flourish in an open- minded society. Often the unknown can be a fearful thought and ignoring or fighting the problem (refugees) seems like an easy fix. The truth is, the refugee crisis will not be solved in 2 years but will have long term consequences for the German demographic. Therefore, there is only one thing left to do: Take a stand and get to know your new neighbors.