



Safe Access. The Humanitarian Admission Programmes for Syrian Refugees in Germany.

Summary

The civil war in Syria, which has been under way since 2011, has led to an enormous humanitarian crisis that continues to worsen: around half of Syria's population has fled their homes. In the neighbouring states of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, more than four million refugees are registered; but their living conditions are absolutely inadequate.

Tensions between refugees and the residents of these countries are also on the rise. In view of the high numbers of refugees, the neighbouring countries have closed their borders to further refugees in some cases.

Until now, the international community has mainly provided financial and logistical aid for refugees from the Syrian civil war and only granted a small number of refugees protection outside of the region. Since the beginning of the civil war, it has pledged to take in around 140,000 people but has so far taken in only part of this number. However, the capacities of the admission programmes are low given the high number of four million refugees in the region. **One consequence is that refugees are increasingly setting off on the irregular and often dangerous trip across the Mediterranean or across land to apply for asylum on European soil.** Overall, more than 330,000 Syrians have applied for asylum in the European Union, of which 110,000 in Germany, between the outbreak of the civil war and August 2015. During the summer months of 2015, the influx gained considerable momentum: tens of thousands of Syrians seeking protection reached the European Union. The very high volume of refugees is putting pressure on the Common European Asylum System, the first steps to relocate refugees from the European border states have been initiated. **The acute crisis shows how urgently ways are needed that allow refugees safe and legal access to Europe.** This Policy Brief looks at German humanitarian admission programmes that could serve as a model for a coordinated European admission programme.

Germany, as the EU Member State with the largest population and strongest economy, has made a special commitment to easing the humanitarian consequences of the Syrian crisis: on



the one hand, the Federal Republic of Germany is providing extensive humanitarian aid in the region and, on the other, Germany has given refuge to at least 150,000 Syrians between 2011 and August 2015, which is considerably more than other industrial nations. Of this figure, more than 35,000 Syrian refugees were taken in on humanitarian grounds directly from the crisis region under the auspices of three federal and 15 *Länder* programmes. The selection process took into account the special need for protection as well as existing ties to Germany; the criteria for acceptance in the individual programmes vary considerably. The legal consequences for the refugees admitted under these programmes are also different from those arising from the asylum procedure, for example, options for permanent residence, access to social and healthcare benefits and access to integration courses.

The admission programmes of the federal government and *Länder* are practical alternatives that complement the asylum procedure. They make it possible, on the one hand, to take in people in need of protection and grant them safe passage to Germany. On the other hand, they ease the burden on the host countries in the region and thus help improve the situation of the refugees who stay in the region.

With its admission programmes for Syrian refugees, Germany has created an infrastructure ('Bridge to Germany') that could serve as a model for the admission of other people in need of protection outside of Germany as well. **The temporary admission programmes should also be used in future crises.**

According to the Policy Brief, the structures of these programmes should be improved drawing on the lessons learned from programmes thus far. For example, several programmes which lead to different residence titles exist in parallel – asylum procedure, federal programmes, *Länder* programmes – where the rights for the same target group vary considerably. Not only is this confusing for the people affected, it also creates a lot of extra administrative work for the authorities responsible. Refugees in programmes at *Länder* level in particular are at a disadvantage in terms of their legal situation. Which is why nearly half of all refugees admitted under *Länder* programmes have switched to the asylum procedure. The Expert Council's Research Unit therefore recommends aligning these rights as much as possible.



Another issue is the strong focus on the existing ties to Germany: as a result, refugees in need of special protection who do not have any contacts in Germany, have little prospect of humanitarian admission. To ensure equal opportunity and ease the burden on the host countries in the region, future programmes should place more emphasis on particularly vulnerable refugees.

Refugees would be initially admitted temporarily under these programmes. It's not possible to say how long they will stay in Germany due to the ongoing civil war in Syria. This creates uncertainty, not only among the refugees themselves, but among the host society as well. Consequently, it should be clearly communicated early on when and under what conditions temporary residence can be turned into permanent residence.

Until now, efforts to create comprehensive and coordinated European admission programmes for Syrian civil war refugees have failed. But these programmes should still be vigorously pursued. This would also send a signal about refugee policy to the crisis region. Even if not all EU countries participate, a "Coalition of the Willing" could be formed. In addition, the EU should financially support temporary admission programmes, similar to the programmes for permanent relocation of refugees from third countries (resettlement) or within the EU (relocation). Countries that don't participate in the admission programmes would therefore at least give others financial assistance.