

Agency, opportunity structure and empowerment in everyday refugee life

**Enduring and overcoming challenges of daily living
in Cologne refugee shelters**

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Summary

To what extent are refugees empowered in their daily lives to overcome legal, material and sociocultural challenges that governmental institutional structures create? In Germany, where over 1 million individuals have received a form of asylum-related protection since 2015, expansive possibilities for life remaking may be superficially presumed, given Germany's robust economy and democratic political systems. As such, the purpose of this PhD research is to describe and understand refugees' capacity for change in daily life in this unique, evolving sociopolitical context. This thesis presents qualitative data from fieldwork conducted in refugee shelters in Cologne—a large, wealthy, progressive city—between 2017 and 2018.

The conceptual approach argues that the possibilities for change are tied primarily to three key areas: 1) the assets and capabilities refugees have (agency); 2) the governmental institutional conditions that define their use (opportunity structure) and 3) the ways these factors interact to enable or constrain choices in building new lives (empowerment). A coding template, constructed deductively from these concepts and inductively from data, is used to analyze legal documents; 48 expert interviews; 28 semi-structured and conversational interviews with refugee families; and 234 pages of field note observations of shelter life. Outcomes are examined at the local level across legal, economic and sociocultural domains of daily living.

Descriptive and thematic analyses reveal that refugee participants' empowerment for change is constrained in each domain, with respect to qualities of agency and opportunity structure influencing capacity for choice. Agency as assets and capabilities is slowly expanding across domains. Participants increasingly value, strive for and gather agency in terms of understanding complex legal information, pursuing favorable legal statuses, learning German, seeking employment, establishing homes, feeling less isolated, building connections with Germans and sensing psychological peace. Legal frameworks, however, do not necessarily align to allow for its effective building or application. Although they are becoming more progressive in some ways and provide adequate levels of basic material support, access to benefits, services and rights change rapidly, creating great instability in what can be pursued as solutions. Similarly, inflexible and hierarchical governance structures limit clear entry points for participants' dynamic engagement within.

As such, participants encounter difficulties executing choices to reach the goals they value. However, whether choices break down at the level of presence, use or effectiveness varies contextually. Origin country or residency status can eliminate the presence of choice, in terms of imposing explicit legal prohibitions. Sociodemographic assets—such as gender, family status, language skills, education or professional background—threaten the use or effectiveness of choice, as individuals reconcile their former identities within new state-determined possibilities for social participation, as well as doubt the realistic possibilities to reach increasingly existential aspirations towards meaningful employment, stability and belonging.

Possessing connections to engaged civil society or local government actors enhances empowerment possibilities most saliently, as such intermediaries are better positioned to navigate aforementioned agency-structure misalignments. These connections are also critical, given that refugee participants do not view shelters—still their dominant living spaces—as homes or community-based sources of help. At the same time, they nonetheless demonstrate empowerment through prioritizing family values and undertaking familiar means of homemaking, finding ways to combat turbulence with creative constructions of culturally meaningful elements of normalcy.

This PhD research contributes to the evolving understanding of how governmental opportunity structures shape refugees' broader possibilities for life remaking. Ultimately, while the consolidated analysis does not cast Germany's refugees more broadly as victims in a state of bare life given legal structures with a humanitarian premise, more stable, multilaterally consistent policy could still limit volatility and enhance possibilities for more empowered life outcomes, as they pursue more sustainable, long-term futures.

Key words: refugees, refugee camps, institutions, daily life, agency, empowerment, Germany

Zusammenfassung

Inwieweit werden Flüchtlinge im Alltag befähigt, rechtliche, materielle und soziokulturelle Herausforderungen zu überwinden, die von staatlichen, institutionellen Strukturen geschaffen werden? In Deutschland, wo seit 2015 mehr als eine Million Migranten Schutzstatus erhalten haben, kann man angesichts der robusten Wirtschaft und dem demokratischen Staatswesen oberflächlich betrachtet vielfältige Möglichkeiten zur Neugestaltung des Lebens vermuten. Diese Dissertation beschreibt, inwieweit Flüchtlinge tatsächlich in der Lage sind, ihren Alltag in diesem einzigartigen und sich entwickelnden gesellschaftspolitischen Zusammenhang zu gestalten. Diese Arbeit stellt qualitative Daten aus einer Feldforschung vor, die in Flüchtlingsunterkünften in Köln—einer großen, wohlhabenden und fortschrittlichen Stadt—zwischen 2017 und 2018 durchgeführt wurde.

Der konzeptionelle Ansatz beruht darauf, dass die Möglichkeiten zur Neugestaltung des Lebens vor allem an drei Schlüsselbereiche gebunden sind: 1) den Vermögenswerten, dem Wissen und den Fähigkeiten, über die Flüchtlinge verfügen (Handlungskompetenz); 2) den staatlichen, institutionellen Bedingungen (gesetzliche Rahmenbedingungen) und 3) die Art und Weise, wie diese beiden Faktoren interagieren, um Entscheidungen beim Aufbau eines neuen Lebens zu ermöglichen oder einzuschränken (Empowerment). Mithilfe dieses Konzeptes und der Daten wurde auf deduktivem und induktivem Weg ein Kodierungsschema entwickelt. Anhand dieses Schemas wurden diverse Gesetzestexte, 48 Experteninterviews, 28 Leitfadeninterviews und Befragungen mit Flüchtlingsfamilien sowie 234 Seiten Feldbeobachtungen über das Leben in einer Flüchtlingsunterkunft analysiert. Die Ergebnisse werden auf lokaler Ebene in den rechtlichen, wirtschaftlichen und soziokulturellen Bereichen des täglichen Lebens untersucht.

Deskriptive und thematische Analysen zeigen, dass das Empowerment von teilnehmenden Flüchtlingen in allen Lebensbereichen eingeschränkt ist, und zwar in Bezug auf die Handlungskompetenz und die rechtlichen Rahmenbedingungen, die die Auswahlfähigkeit beeinflussen. Die Handlungskompetenz mit Vermögen und Fähigkeiten erweitert sich langsam über die Lebensbereiche hinweg. Die teilnehmenden Flüchtlinge streben zunehmend nach Handlungskompetenz und eignen sich diese an, indem sie lernen, komplexe, rechtliche Informationen zu verstehen; versuchen, einen besseren rechtlichen Status zu erhalten; die deutsche Sprache erlernen; Arbeit suchen; sich ein Zuhause schaffen; sich weniger isoliert fühlen; Verbindungen zu Deutschen aufbauen und ihr seelisches Gleichgewicht wiederfinden. Die rechtlichen Rahmenbedingungen sind jedoch nicht unbedingt darauf ausgerichtet, die Handlungskompetenz effektiv auszubauen oder zu ermöglichen. Obwohl die Gesetze in mancher Hinsicht fortschrittlicher werden und eine angemessene, materielle Grundversorgung bieten, ändert sich der Zugriff auf Leistungen, Dienste und Rechte schnell. Dies führt zu einer großen Unsicherheit, wenn es um die Problemlösung in Alltagssituationen geht. In ähnlicher Weise erhöhen unflexible, hierarchische Behördenstrukturen die Hürden für teilnehmenden Flüchtlinge, um sich effektiv für ihre Lebensgestaltung einzusetzen.

Daher haben Flüchtlinge Schwierigkeiten, Entscheidungen zu treffen, um die von ihnen gewünschten Ziele zu erreichen. Ob Auswahlmöglichkeiten jedoch auf der Ebene des Vorhandenseins, der Nutzung oder des Erfolgs zusammenbrechen, variiert kontextabhängig. Das Herkunftsland oder der Aufenthaltsstatus kann das Vorhandensein von Auswahlmöglichkeiten durch explizite rechtliche Verbote verhindern. Soziodemografische Faktoren - wie Geschlecht, Familienstand, Sprachkenntnisse, Bildung oder beruflicher Hintergrund - können die Nutzung oder den Erfolg von Auswahlmöglichkeiten ebenso gefährden, da Individuen ihre früheren Identitäten mit den neuen, staatlich festgelegten gesellschaftlichen Teilnahmemöglichkeiten in Einklang bringen müssen. Darüber hinaus zweifeln Flüchtlinge an, ob ihre angestrebten, zunehmend höheren Ziele wie eine sinnvolle Beschäftigung, Stabilität und Zugehörigkeit realistisch überhaupt zu erreichen sind.

Persönliche Verbindungen zu engagierten Bürgerrechtlern oder kommunalen Handlungsträgern erhöhen die Möglichkeiten des Empowerments am stärksten, da solche Vermittler besser in der Lage sind, die oben erwähnten Ungleichgewichte zwischen Behörden und Strukturen zu überwinden. Diese Verbindungen sind auch deshalb so wichtig, weil teilnehmenden Flüchtlinge die Unterkünfte—in denen der Großteil immer noch untergebracht ist—nicht als ihr Zuhause oder als gemeindebasiertes Hilfsangebot ansehen. Gleichzeitig zeigen Flüchtlinge aber auch Empowerment, indem sie familiäre Werte in den Vordergrund stellen, ihr Zuhause auf vertraute Art einrichten, gewohntes Essen zubereiten und Wege finden, Krisen mithilfe von für sie kulturell wichtigen Traditionen und Ritualen zu bekämpfen und dadurch Normalität für sich herzustellen.

Diese Doktorarbeit trägt zu dem sich entwickelnden Verständnis darüber bei, wie staatliche Strukturen die Möglichkeiten von Flüchtlingen zur Neugestaltung ihres Lebens beeinflussen. Unter den gegebenen zusammengelegten Analysen, da die rechtlichen Strukturen humanitär ausgerichtet sind, finden sich Flüchtlinge in Deutschland insgesamt letztendlich zwar nicht als Opfer in einem Zustand des nackten Überlebens wieder, aber eine stabilere, multilateral konsistente Politik könnte die Labilität begrenzen und den Flüchtlingen, die eine langfristige, nachhaltigere Zukunft in Deutschland anstreben, verbesserte Möglichkeiten zu einem Leben mit mehr Empowerment bieten.

Stichworte: Flüchtlinge, Flüchtlingslager, Institutionen, Alltagsleben, Handlungskompetenz, Empowerment, Deutschland

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Glossary of Key Terms and Abbreviations

Key Terms

See Appendix F for further translations and clarifications of specific types of refugee shelters. Figure 12 in Chapter 5 also contains additional clarifications of legal status terminology.

Ankommen	Arrival (literal); embeddedness, rootedness
Asylantragstellende	Asylum applicant (legal); person who has filed a formal asylum application
Asylbewerber	Asylum applicant or asylum seeker (semantic)
Asylsuchende	Asylum seeker (legal); person who has initially registered with authorities, but has not yet filed a formal asylum application
Aufenthaltserlaubnis	Time-bound / limited residence permit
Aufenthalt(stitel)	Residence permit (general)
Ausbildung	(Vocational) training course / program
Bleibrecht	Right to remain
Bundesland	State (i.e., the 16 German federated states)
Duldung / geduldet	Toleration (status) / holding tolerated status
Einwanderungsland	Country of immigration
Flüchtling	Refugee (semantic or legal)
Flüchtlingskrise	Refugee crisis
Flüchtlingsschutz (Schutzstatus)	Protection status (full refugee recognition, subsidiary protection or ban on deportation)
Kindergeld	(Monthly) child subsidy
Niederlassungserlaubnis	Permanent residence permit / settlement permit
Papiere	Papers (i.e., legal status documents)
Paten(familie)	Godparent (guardian/sponsor) (family)
Regierungsbezirk Köln	Administrative district Cologne
Residenzpflicht	Presence limitations
Runder Tisch für Flüchtlingsfragen	Round Table for Refugee Issues (Cologne)
Stadt Köln	City of Cologne (municipal government)
Taschengeld	“Pocket money” (stipend for asylum seekers)
Teufelskreis	“Devil’s circle” (literal); a vicious cycle
Turnhalle	Sport hall / gym accommodation
Willkommensinitiative	Welcome initiative
Willkommenskultur	Welcome culture
Wir schaffen das	We can do it
Wohngeld	(Monthly) housing entitlement
Wohnsitzauflage	Residence restrictions

Acronyms

See Appendices G, H and I for further translations and clarifications of specific government and third-sector organizations. German titles, abbreviations and translations of laws are provided in the references.

AAA	American Anthropological Association
AIDA	Asylum Information Database
AK (Arbeitskreis Politik)	Working Group Politics (Cologne)
AnKER (Ankunft, Entscheidung und kommunale Verteilung bzw. Rückführung)	Arrival, Decision and Municipal Distribution or Return (Center)
BAA (Bundesagentur für Arbeit)	Federal Employment Agency
BAMF (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge)	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
BiBB (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung)	Federal Institute for Vocational Training
BMAS (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales)	Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs
BMFSFJ (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend)	Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
BMI (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat)	Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community
BMJV (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz)	Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection
DESTATIS (Statistisches Bundesamt)	Federal Statistical Office
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DRK (Deutsches Rotes Kreuz)	German Red Cross
EASY (Erstverteilung der Asylbegehrenden)	Initial Distribution of Asylum-Seekers
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
HIP	Humanitarian Innovation Project, University of Oxford
IHK Köln (Industrie- und Handelskammer zu Köln)	Chamber of Commerce, Cologne
NRW (Nordrhein Westfalen)	North Rhine Westphalia
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
TCO	Third-sector organization
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
ZEF (Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung)	Center for Development Research

Notes on the Use of Translation

The following explanation reviews how I handle non-English language terms and translations in this manuscript. I discuss more details and specific methodological decisions in Chapter 4 (Studying everyday refugee life in Cologne: research design and methods).

Use of foreign terms in text

To promote comprehension for the widest readership, I use English translations as much as possible. I have included non-English organizational names and key terms in the glossary, along with their translations and associated abbreviations. The reference list contains the same information for laws and legal texts.

For the names of German federal government agencies, laws or regulations, I use the name translated into English at first use, followed by the German name and acronym. I refer to them henceforth by their German acronyms to best assist readers in finding original sources (with relevant German nomenclature) and maintain conventions I have observed in both English and German literature. For the use of legal terms or local departments, I use the most equivalent English translations when disambiguation is not necessary (for example, “state” for *Bundesland*). When the inclusion of a German term or phrase is relevant, I provide it in parentheses or brackets, along with the English translation in the main text. When further clarification or a long excerpt of non-English text is required, I provide this in a footnote.

In the main text, I have cited sources using non-English acronyms for organizations or original spellings of authors’ names as noted in the source documents. Within the references, I note original foreign titles and do not provide translations (unless the work itself is an external translation or has an official translation, in which case it is referenced accordingly). This is to ensure that sources are easily retrieved.

Quoting and translations

I provide all quotations from literature, field notes and interview transcripts within the text in English. **All translations shown are my own**, unless explicitly cited as externally translated sources. As a default, I do not provide the original German text within the manuscript, unless specific disambiguation is needed. When this is required to maintain meaning or accuracy, I provide explanations in footnotes. Translations are faithful and communicative, written to preserve as much original meaning and context as possible with an emphasis on understandability. When quoting from German conversations with refugee participants, I have translated frequently grammatically incorrect German into grammatically and contextually correct English for readability purposes, but attempted to preserve the simplicity of utterances via word choice and sentence structure. I have quoted field notes and hand-written interview transcripts as I wrote them, with minor corrections made to adjust incorrect spelling or grammar for readability’s sake.

Notes on the Use of Refugee Terminology

As *refugee* can be a contentious and ambiguous term, it is necessary to clarify how the work treats its usage. This work adopts three primary uses of terminology, depending on what is required for contextual clarity and specificity. The following explanations apply to terminology use throughout the manuscript.

First, when the work uses the unbounded term *refugee* or *refugee migrants*, it refers generally and semantically to displaced people migrating in order to flee persecution or conflict, pursuing their migration within asylum-seeking channels and living within the corresponding legal frameworks that govern those channels. This semantic use stems from the definition of the 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines a *refugee* as a person “who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (p. 3). In line with how common academic and industry discourse similarly applies this term, this work uses this general term to describe trends pertaining to this type of migrant, referring to them as *refugees* or *refugee migrants* because this channel of migration is legally and functionally distinct from other channels of work-, family- or education-based migration or even “undocumented” migration.

Second, when a disambiguation referring to legal or procedural status is necessary, the work uses more specific terms like *legal refugee* or *recognized refugee* (to refer to those with fully adjudicated, explicit legal statuses) or *asylum seeker* (to refer to those whose applications are still being processed) to be clear about the legal stage or status of rights being referenced.

Third, when the work refers collectively to the stories, observations and data of individual refugee migrants within the study context, it uses terms such as *shelter residents*, *individuals in the study context* and *refugee participants* as so not to erroneously overgeneralize. It uses *experts*, *governance actors* or professional titles when referring to non-refugee participants.

The work deals with the usage of German-language terms similarly, referring to *refugees* as a general type of migrant group within German legal migration structures. If a disambiguation referring to legal or procedural status is necessary, translations of relevant legal terms are used; for example, *legal*, *recognized* or *protected refugee* (translation of the corresponding German legal term *Flüchtlingsschutz*), person with *subsidiary protection* (*Subsidiärschutz*) or *tolerated person/person with toleration* (*Duldung*). All participants in the study were living in Cologne with residency statuses related to the legal asylum-seeking processes. Their specific statuses are mentioned when describing them, as well as in Appendix A.

The translated German terminology to refer specifically to refugee migrants with outstanding asylum applications is more difficult to contend with. The German asylum process uses two specific legal terms. The term *Asylsuchende* refers to those who have arrived in Germany but have not yet had their asylum application claim officially registered. The term *Asylantragstellende* refers to those with registered applications whose claims have not yet been adjudicated. The term *Asylantragstellende* has been officially translated in government parlance to *asylum applicant*. The term *Asylsuchende* has been officially translated to *asylum seeker*, which might pose confusion regarding if the term refers to a specific type of migrant within a stage of the German legal system or simply the more generalized semantic term of a person whose claim has not been fully adjudicated. In this study, the term *asylum seeker* is used generally and semantically to refer to people when it is necessary to distinguish that they are in any stage of the process of pursuing an application for the legal status of recognized refugeehood. If the distinction is warranted, the untranslated German terms are used specifically to refer to people within these distinct stages of the German asylum application process.

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Reflections on Positionality in the Research Context

The process of anthropological and ethnographic qualitative research is ongoing and iterative. Our initial ideas and experiences color the ways we approach our research questions, which in turn become colored by the ideas and experiences we encounter while investigating them. To deny our own positionality is to deny the nature of our research. Framing positionality within research thus becomes necessary to acknowledge and reflect on, especially since positionality can, in and of itself, be fluid and iterative (Cousin, 2010). By placing such reflections on positionality at the forefront of this manuscript, I aim to offer transparency into the mechanisms of my thoughts and biases, namely to challenge the methodological critique that positionality makes qualitative research detrimentally subjective. Instead, when used and disclosed openly, positionality need not harm the integrity of research, but rather, can be considered a critical element of the research approach and overall process. Much of the benefit of qualitative research comes from the contextual intimacy researchers can develop with their participants by capitalizing on the adaptable elements of personal identity and finding shared social-emotional spaces to connect with one another. Positionality also assists in the conceptualization and analysis of critical components of research. According to Hammond and Wellington (2013) in *Research Methods: The Key Concepts*:

The assumption has been that positionality limits our understanding of a particular context, but it is the fact that we have a position that enables us to make sense of a social situation. Observation and interpretation is necessarily theory laden and to do either without a position is not a neutral or value-free stance but is to exist in a state of mental disassociation and disintegration. Many practitioner researchers take advantage of their position to inform their research (p. 119).

In accordance with this view, I have not viewed positionality as a detriment, but rather, as a tool to navigate and improve various areas of my research. Doing fieldwork across multiple social fields and in multiple languages required constant reflection on how to best present myself to better identify with those I sought insight from. Being aware of myself and my experiences aided me in building an interaction environment where comfort for sharing and mutual opportunities for learning were present. Expanding and evolving along with the research, my positionality as formed by my past, my identity and my experiences has influenced various aspects of the project since its inception. What follows is a description of this trajectory.

When my husband received a military posting to Cologne, Germany as an exchange pilot with the German Air Force, the posting entitled us both to full-time German language training at the US Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. We were students there between summer 2015 and 2016. I had left my job as a small business management consultant in San Francisco, but was excited to apply my newly developing language skills in a different context when I discovered the PhD program I would ultimately pursue. I began the first work on this project in early 2016 writing the program's application. My initial experiences as a language student were formative with regards to how I was exposed to the topic of refugee migration in Germany. To this end, I was convinced of the necessity of research on the issue early on.

By the end of 2015, thousands of refugee migrants had entered Europe. Simultaneously, news about these events flooded into our days in German class, as we translated countless media stories and discussed the contentious notion of "migration crisis" in Germany. My early perspectives were those of an inquiring, but external and new, observer to German current events, further distilled and often oversimplified from the lack of nuances understood with second language learning. But work on my language skills persisted, as did the growing familiarity with the developing migration issues. The stories kept coming for translating, discussing and analyzing. In particular, the 2015 New Year's Eve celebrations in central Cologne (the very city we would soon live in) were a definitive turning point in Germany's sociopolitical discourse concerning refugees and migration (Weber, 2016). This unexpected mass sexual assault and robbery of hundreds of

women, presumably at the hands of migrant individuals, meant that 2016 brought stories about crisis-driven legal changes, the rise of alternative right wing political movements, the waning of the volunteer spirit and an emerging attitude of questioning and fear that had not necessarily characterized the initial reports of open enthusiasm and “welcome culture” (*Willkommenskultur*) in the refugee migration context. One position of mine formed early on and maintained throughout the course of the project was that the implications of Germany’s influx of refugee migration were around to stay in the form of social, economic and political challenges that would not be solved easily or quickly. It was (and still is) clear to me that they would continue to present themselves as critical events in the shaping of Europe’s future.¹ This initial exposure at the Institute alerted me to the magnitude of the issue at hand and gave me a more pressing awareness of just how acute the need for research on the matter would be.

While the American media also covered many of the developments, the upcoming November 2016 election anchored the reporting within debates of how America could approach its own migration issues and either avoid or replicate the actions of Germany and Europe. My perspective was already becoming unique, in that I was learning from both the outside and the inside how the events were unfolding. From the outside, I was an American, physically isolated from the events themselves and merely reading about them, albeit closely, through German media reporting in an intensive language class and American media reporting to citizens concerned with upcoming electoral issues. At the same time, that immersed reading, which defined hours and hours of my days via my coursework, meant I was receiving a close, intimate and continual exposure to what was going on as it unfolded in real time.

This insider-outsider paradox of my own positionality was both unique and situationally advantageous, persisting throughout the project. It often felt as if my initial physical and ongoing nationalistic detachment from the topic allowed me to understand and process situational elements more for their own sake, without more potentially impeding emotional biases clouding answers to questions that were directly changing the social fabric or essence of *my own* people or *my own* hometown. Cologne was just a city where I lived as a second-language speaking expat and student for a definite amount of time. My mental efforts in my research were thus freer and felt less weighed down by the emotions of seeing (and participating in) first-hand change of the social nature of my own culture.

This insider-outsider paradox continued to assist me throughout other elements of the project, especially as fieldwork advanced. I often found it provided both distance from and proximity to my research participants and partners that piqued curiosity and offered a more intimate starting point for conversation. Government officials and TSO leaders in particular were often initially inquisitive, wondering why an American would learn German and pursue a PhD studying what they often considered a uniquely European, if not a German issue. What interest or stake could an academic such as myself really have in the matter? Rather than lead to antagonism, I found that this polite inquisition led to valuable personal knowledge exchanges that helped me both to clarify my own research relevance, but also expand their thinking about how lessons from their own context might apply quite relevantly in others. One exchange at the end of an interview with the city government leader overseeing the division of refugee initiatives demonstrates such an example of this position. Ultimately, I was able to address the official’s curious inquiries and to establish my own credibility by connecting the German case to an external context, leading him to inquire more specifically about improvement opportunities in the Cologne context:

¹ As Europe faces new demographic changes, this position has become common across scholarship. See, for example, commentary from the Carnegie Institute of International Peace that characterizes the implications of Europe’s migration flows so seriously as to “lead to either more Europe, less Europe or the emergence of a new core of committed member states” (Lehne, 2016) or former Center for Transatlantic Relations director András Simonyi’s testimony that “it is a defining moment in history whether Europe embraces [multiculturalism] fully or only half-heartedly” (Simonyi & Brattberg, 2015).

Official: I really notice you're quite well immersed in this theme. [...] Are you feeling enthusiastic to continue?

Me: Yes, I am always finding it interesting. So, the reason for my research; I can clarify somewhat. I read a very good book on the refugee situation in Africa, particularly in Uganda. The book discussed innovative conditions coming 'from the bottom up' in refugee camps. [...] Refugees organized themselves to fulfil their own needs, and I thought, do we have similar capabilities here in Germany? We have a completely different environment, but does the theoretical possibility for such bottom-up problem solving exist? [...] In the moment, I have seen it like this: yes, it is completely different in Germany. We have a completely different society here in Germany with very strong laws and policies—good policies, objectively good conditions—but then it means that there is not really a way to fill such needs-based voids in innovative ways. The needs in our case are not really material [...] and it is quite difficult to find innovative ways to fulfil more abstract needs. [...]

Official: It would be good if you remain in this area. I really find it very good.

Me: Exactly, thank you. I'm focusing really only here in Cologne, on the policies here. [...]

Official: I see. Well, tell us then, is there something we could do differently even now? (Interview with leader, Municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018)

At the same time, the paradox often made me wonder how some policy makers might have viewed the seriousness of my concerns about the limited opportunities to empower refugee migrants towards success. I was always upfront about my status as a foreign researcher interested to learn about the various types of challenges refugees experienced in daily life in Germany. As my research advanced, I could also more easily convey the difficulties I observed in life remaking in refugee shelters. Language difficulties consistently came up as a reason. But I often worried that if I myself as a migrant had learned German well enough in just 9 months to obtain an advanced proficiency for a PhD, could I convey accurately that my situation was also contextually privileged and distinct? I never wanted to promote any stereotypes that negative outcomes were simply the result of not trying hard enough.² But to address these worries within these conversations, I always stressed the framework of my research and focused the discussions around the nature of how specific refugee-related structural and institutional challenges might impede their agency—that is, even their individuality and determination—to integrate and meet specific success metrics.

My particular position as a potential "success case" did not concern me as much within the context of my interaction with refugees and their families. The dynamics of these interactions were quite different than those with officials, although subject to the insider-outsider paradox in alternative ways. Especially when I first entered the field, I felt more attuned to the potential negativities of the normative caricature of the German volunteer, "historically sedimented by specific understandings of gender, racial and class difference" in which "the difference between the modern emancipated female volunteer and the female oppressed refugee plays a central role" (Braun, 2017, p. 38). I recall bristling at an instance Braun describes of this power play in which a German female volunteer expresses offense that a refugee rejects an offer of a pretzel upon arrival at an emergency shelter. Braun (2017) analyzes:

It is clear that, in this situation, the pretzel became more than a bit of food that had been declined. Instead, the act of refusal was read and understood by the volunteer as a rejection of the welcome gesture itself. Some of the other volunteers joined in the outrage, with one commenting 'you shouldn't be picky in such a situation' and another chiming in 'that is not decent behavior' (p. 43).

² In January 2018, a story from the widely circulated *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper presented a misleading headline claiming "4 out of 5 refugees fail the German test" (Hensel, 2018). Opaquely addressed in the article, hidden behind a paywall online, was the fact that the statistic applied only to a sub-group of (all age) integration course participants who were formerly illiterate. In fact, government statistics placed the highest integration course pass rates (that is, participants reaching a level of B1 German, or basic working proficiency) at 48.7% for 2017 (BAMF, 2018b). Unfortunately, the disparity did not stop the alternative right-wing party Alternative for Germany from using the misrepresented news story and information on its Twitter account to fuel (increasingly common) stereotypes that refugees are unmotivated and incapable (Goldman, 2018).

Having read Braun's work before entering the field as a volunteer myself, and thus more conscious of these notions of power structure and expectations, I strove from the beginning to avoid, to the best of my abilities, such power plays or notions that refugees ought to be grateful for my help. I also realized the need to consider more subtle subjugations of power. For example, knowing that I might be privy to difficult stories that might disturb me, I could not invert the traumatic experiences of refugee participants onto myself and turn myself into the victim for merely having had to listen to them. I had to accept some degree of passivity. I had to understand that I would always possess some level of outsider status because I was emancipated and not a refugee. To work within and remain conscious of this position, I simply strove to "be present" for the families I worked with as a grateful visitor to their domain, subject to the rules they wished. This meant I came when was convenient for them, worked with them until they requested to stop, took tea and food with them when offered and sat for long periods to listen to whatever they had to share.

At the same time, there were ways in which I was similar to those I was working with. I believed I could mitigate some of the more challenging aspects of outsider status and power dynamics by capitalizing on shared insider qualities. Because individuals are dynamic, and positionality is malleable, it is possible to "achieve temporary shared positionalities with research participants," a key methodological point Srivastava (2016) observes in her fieldwork that also crossed intersecting social fields and language (p. 210). With regards to any social position, Merton's (1972) seminal sociological work has long underscored that "individuals have not a single status but a status set: a complement of variously interrelated statuses which interact" such that "they typically confront one another simultaneously as insiders and outsiders" (p. 22). I found my insider element of the paradox: the fact that I, too, was a migrant, a second-language learner, a newcomer to a new land. Of course, my migration circumstances had been advantaged, free and straightforward, but I was still subject to many similar procedures of daily life as a migrant: appointments, paperwork and bureaucracy on the logistical side and some feelings of alienation and otherness on the emotional side. Taking advantage of these shared qualities helped me to avoid an entirely imbalanced and power-driven relationship and instead find small areas of common ground on which to begin to build deeper relationships that were friendly and, I believe, ultimately mutually beneficial.

As a check to confirm my positive perceptions and evaluate whether or not the attempts to find common ground as a partial insider were successful, I took note of how refugees themselves described our relationships. As we spent more time together, the mutual benefit to one another was evident in that participants began referring to me as friends, and, often, it became unclear who was providing help to whom. In one instance, a gruff volunteer accused a Syrian refugee, Mrs. P2, of abusing too much volunteer help because she discovered us chatting and drinking tea together in the shelter kitchen. Shaken and surprised myself by the presumption that support in the form of friendship, conversation and tea drinking was potentially unacceptable to a higher-ranking volunteer, I found myself embarrassed and confused as to how to react in the aftermath. I was surprised when Mrs. P2 ended up being the one to reassure me, but comforted to know she viewed me in such close companionship and wholly unlike the gruff volunteer she had worked with previously:

When [the female volunteer] leaves, P2 turns to me, still with a slightly dismayed look. I think she has understood the awkwardness of the woman's earlier comment. She whispers to me, "No, stay. Don't worry. This woman is always like that. You and me, though? We're sisters. Let's just drink our tea." I try to laugh and smile as so to convey thanks for her reassurance and kind words; I feel guilty at who should be reassuring whom. (Field notes, April 11, 2018)

Another Syrian refugee, Mrs. M1, who I considered my closest informant throughout my work, expressed dismay on my behalf when I told her that I was leaving Germany to move back to the United States and our residence permit would no longer be valid:

“Why?” she asked me, over and over again.

I explained, “We have to leave because my husband’s work contract is done. My papers are tied to his job.”

“No papers, no right to stay,” M1 lamented.³

“That’s how it is,” I responded. [...]

She continued to express her lack of understanding, describing my experience relative to those of other refugees. She said, “There are many people here in the shelter from Serbia. They do not work. They do not go to school. They do not speak German. You speak German. You work. You go to school. Why do they have papers, but your papers go away? Germany! I don’t understand.” (Field notes, May 22, 2018)

Although she was the person whom I was the most bothered to tell about my departure, the sympathy in her response and the nature of her comparisons gave me confidence and reassurance that I had been able to develop positive relationships during my fieldwork and find ways to connect with participants over our shared similarities as migrants.

I always believed that being upfront and honest about these similarities and differences with both myself and my participants was beneficial. From a methodological perspective, it meant that I was actively making my positionality “a component of the actual process of understanding” my place within the research paradigm (Maxwell, 2012, p. 98). While I was hesitant to offer lengthy views to high-ranking government officials, namely due to restrictions in time and standards of professional courtesy, I disclosed polite, short, but honest observations about my own difficulties with bureaucracy and integration as a migrant in Germany when directly asked about my personal experiences. With participants who acted more as key informants, confidants and friends, I was able to have more reflective conversations. Of course, these helped develop rapport. But, perhaps more importantly, they helped me to make sense of my own thoughts and internal conflicts. I was conscious to think of my positionality throughout my work, but at times, it felt cumbersome to wonder if I was feeling the “right” things and presenting myself in the “right” ways. To be able to address these concerns openly with participants helped ease these emotional questions and give me confidence that I could identify well with others and move forward productively.

Ultimately, a separate manuscript could be dedicated to the various manifestations of positionality within this research. The dynamic interplays between experiences, power, expectations and interpersonal relations are in and of themselves worthy topics of study. This discourse here, however, is merely an overview. I disclose these reflections to provide acknowledgment of how I incorporated, addressed and utilized my positionality as a component of my research. In making sense of life remaking, people are often just making do with what they can. Naturalistic research is similar in this regard. In making sense of human complexity, researchers (myself included) are making do with the positionality they possess. But I am confident that I have made the most of harnessing my positionality and experiences for the betterment of this project, hoping the manuscript conveys this convincingly and empirically.

³ The word used in German was *Aufenthalt*, the general term for a residency permit. It was common for refugees in the study to use this term more in the vernacular sense to simply mean the ability to stay in Germany with some level of certainty.

1. Introduction

Wondering how to take root: Family P2, a middle-aged Syrian married couple with four children and fully recognized refugee status

Their small shelter space is always filled with the aromas of tea, the energy of their four young children and the coming-and-going of multiple volunteers. Mr. and Mrs. P2, Kurdish Syrians in their mid-30 who ultimately receive fully recognized refugee status, are not strangers to seeking refuge in search of a better life. Germany is originally a distant destination. She doesn't really want to leave Syria, Mrs. P2 explains, because she has grown up there. Most of her family, including her parents and five siblings, still live in a small town about two hours away from Afrin, a small city where there has been ongoing violence from Turkish militants. She frequently saves videos on her phone of the related news coverage in these areas. In one video she shows me over tea, a missile heads for a small fort in Afrin waving a white flag of surrender. It blows up. Their family left, she says, because they could never know if their town might be next.

In Syria, Mr. P2 is trained as a welder, but owns a small business that drills wells and foundations for construction sites. When the family leaves Syria, they live for a time in Turkey, Morocco and Algeria, where Mr. P2 is able to find more in the way of informal construction work, and the culture is more familiar to what they know. But Mr. P2 ultimately becomes tired of the poor working conditions he faces underground and his lack of earning capacity. He simply can't equal the middle-class income his business generated in Syria. When their money reserves are largely depleted, the family arrives to Europe by way of Spain. "Spain was beautiful," Mrs. P2 reminisces. "The people there were friendly. But there was still no money there. Absolutely no money. And what can a person do without money?" (Field notes, May 11, 2018). After living briefly there for a few months without papers—as trafficking routes from northern Africa to Spain run rampant in 2015—they travel to Germany through France in the aisles of an overcrowded bus, when Mrs. P2 is heavily pregnant with their fourth child. They hope to file asylum applications in Germany, as they have heard about the borders opening to Syrian refugee migrants from Mr. P2's cousins, long-settled in the country, and his brother, in the process of settling his own family's asylum claim. Once they are in Germany, they do not see much of this family. The cousins live in a city farther from Cologne, and visiting restrictions in the shelters in which they live often prevent easy visits anyway.

In some ways, life in Germany brings them renewed hope that they might find ways to enhance their choices for a better life. Mrs. P2 explains, "My husband is in school, and I am in school. We have some money and some help. At least now, I have shelter, I can be inside, I can cook" (Field notes, May 11, 2018). Mr. P2 eventually finds a part-time job loading boxes at night with DHL. As they both explain to me, they willingly accept in their home as many volunteers who are willing to help them. In as much as they can choose to do so, they try to improve their German, keep their minds occupied and replicate the constant buzz of entertaining visitors common in their daily home life in Syria. Through their attempts to be social, put forth friendly faces and learn about other Germans by way of such entertainment, they grow their connections to shelter volunteers, a few local German neighbors and teachers from their children's school.

But in other ways, their attempts to move forward are always burdened by underlying melancholy and uncertainty. Despite seeming somewhat well-off for a refugee family, their hope is always clouded by hesitancy, as they feel a constant questioning of what it means to really belong and how they might choose, or rather, be compelled, to take root in a new place, as Mr. P2 reflects:

I have the feeling that I need to take the culture from here. Besides, maybe I don't have a culture. I've lived in so many places. I left Syria a long time ago. [...] When I was in my speaking group yesterday, we were practicing saying, "Where are you from? I come from..." When they asked me, I said, "I come from a suitcase."

The others asked me, “A suitcase?”

I said, “Yes. I’ve always been on the road.” We Kurdish people don’t have our own country anyway. We were living in Syria, but the government wouldn’t give us any papers or documents. We weren’t real. But Germany is the best place in Europe. Syrians can get papers here. So, maybe it means I need to take the culture from here. (Field notes, April 29, 2018)

For Mr. P2, he wonders if inclusion means losing parts of his own past self because possibilities for an improved life seem so conditionally tied to his German legal status. He wonders if he is somehow only real because his German papers say he has the right to exist. Must he choose or adopt, then, only what German structures and culture demand that he do? Or does he have room to incorporate his own preferences and choices within these new bounds? For Mrs. P2, these questions often weigh heavily, especially when she wishes it were easier for her husband to find more meaningful work like in Syria, or she wonders why her family still is not able to find their own apartment. We have the right papers, Mrs. P2 acknowledges, echoing Mr. P2’s sentiments that their recognized refugee status in Germany might somehow give them the legal or existential legitimacy they seek for so long, as if being human is not condition enough. “But I can’t really laugh a lot,” Mrs. P2 reflects one afternoon through tears, as common an accompaniment to the many cups of tea we share as date-filled biscuits and German homework. “I don’t know if I am happy. I just think [...] always, can I be okay?” (Field notes, May 11, 2018).

By this point, the family has already lived in Germany almost three years. They wait over a year for their initial claim decision, while subject to the mental and physical health difficulties caused by life in various municipal refugee shelters. The possibility of eventual renewal of their legal status remains unclear to them, with ever-changing laws and potential standards for income earning or language knowledge. Despite his social, outgoing nature to interact with other Germans, and general learning and business acumen, Mr. P2 is remediating his integration language course after a previous failure; Mrs. P2 remains in a lower-level class. Mr. P2’s part-time work offers a small amount of discretionary income, but not enough to save for an apartment down payment or become entirely self-sufficient. Mrs. P2 is unlikely to find any work without more language progression. Their lives in Germany bring them safety from their violent past, but also emotional challenges wondering how they will be able to make choices in their lives in the long term.

Although the family’s journey is unique because it is their own, it embodies common, highly interconnecting elements of contemporary German refugee migration experiences examined within this work. Such stories of endurance, challenge and overcoming are becoming commonplace in Germany, where over 1 million individuals have received a form of asylum-related protection since 2015. As Family P2’s story and the work’s title imply, daily life for refugee migrants in Germany, although safe from the persecution- and war-related violence they fled, remains complex in its undertaking. It is filled with intersecting types of individual and structural challenges shaping bounds and choices in new possibilities for living. Establishing in a new place, rebuilding life and moving on are not merely about individual drive or motivation, as Family P2’s own desires suggest. Despite their own high levels of motivation and even their permissive legal status, they still question how these might more easily manifest in their choices working through challenges in driving ways forward in their new life—legally, economically and socially. They want to take root in their new home country; to build social networks, to work, to find more mental peace. But they also want reasonable prospects for the individual choice in how to do so; to maintain their legal status with more certainty, to have more earning potential in a profession that feels more relevant, to entertain in a home outside of a shelter (perhaps where exchange with Germans might be more reciprocal). They strive to feel peace that comes with knowing they might be able to better choose their own aspects of living and apply their capacities towards this end. How they, and others like them, may or may not be empowered to do so, given the conditions of their own resources and the asylum structures that shape their use, is explored as the central aim of this manuscript.

1.1 Challenges in the daily living of modern refugees

As *refugee* can be a politically contentious and academically ambiguous term, it is necessary to briefly clarify how the work treats its usage. This work adopts three primary uses of terminology, depending on what is required for contextual clarity and specificity. First, when the work uses the unbounded term *refugee* or *refugee migrants*, it refers generally and semantically to forcibly displaced people migrating in order to flee state persecution,⁴ pursuing their migration within asylum channels and living within the corresponding legal frameworks that govern those channels. The work uses this general term to describe trends and conditions pertaining to this type of migrant, referring to them as *refugees* because the channel of refugee migration is legally and functionally distinct from other channels of work-, family- or education-based migration or even “undocumented” migration.⁵ Second, when a disambiguation referring to legal or procedural status is necessary, the work uses more specific terms like *legal refugee* or *recognized refugee* (those with fully adjudicated statuses) or *asylum seeker* (those whose applications are still being processed) to be clear about the legal stage or delineated status of rights being referenced. Third, when the work refers collectively to the stories, observations and data of individual refugee migrants within the study context, it uses terms such as *shelter residents*, *individuals* and *participants* as so not to incorrectly overgeneralize.⁶ It uses *experts*, *governance actors* or professional titles when referring to non-refugee participants.

Like Family P2’ s, stories of forced displacement are becoming increasingly common for many around the world. Especially in the latter half of the 20th century, the intersections of war, violence, sociopolitical exclusion and state failure have increased the numbers of individuals migrating as refugees, attempting to cross borders to escape advancing persecution. As of 2020, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that over 26 million legally labelled refugees, 4 million registered asylum seekers and 4 million stateless individuals live as a result of such forced displacement across the world (UNHCR, 2020). The international community, host governments and third-sector organizations⁷ (TSOs) are being forced to address the resulting complex social, political and economic fallout in response to these crises of state-driven displacement. Relying on the frameworks codified in the 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention), and based on principles of development studies, coordinated international, national and civil society responses to emerging refugee migration situations have saved countless lives in situations of emergency.

At the same time, they have also led to bureaucratic inefficiencies, welfare system dependencies and unsustainable governance policies that have threatened refugees’ agency as a migrant group to be empowered to choose how to improve their own situations and enhance their host communities over time (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, & Omata, 2016; Jacobsen, 2014; UNHCR, 2006). As the multidimensional challenges created by these issues continue to grow, refugee life increasingly finds itself at the margins of a society. Across the world, refugees as a migrant group suffer from persistent poorer conditions of health (Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2008; Giuntella, Kone, Ruiz, & Vargas-Silva, 2018), employment rates and financial earnings (Connor, 2010; Waxman, 2001), rights (Nyers, 2013) and general means of socioeconomic participation (Jacobsen, 2002, 2005), compared to citizens and other types of migrants in host countries. Many of these outcomes stem from broader problems within host-country governance structures (Chambers, 1986),

⁴ This refers to the semantic definition of a refugee, based on the 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, describing individuals unable to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted.

⁵ Jacobsen (2005) notes that this generalized use is “common parlance” in both academic and industry contexts (p. 4).

⁶ The section “Notes on the Use of Refugee Terminology” further clarifies the use of terms in the manuscript.

⁷ Due to the complexity of categorizing specific types of civil society organizations in Germany, the term “third sector” will be used in the manuscript as an umbrella term to refer to limited-profit or not-for-profit, non-government entities (Zimmer, Hoemke, Pahl & Rentzsch, 2016). According to Gluns (2018c, p. 1), in Germany specifically, these include: free welfare associations (semi-public confederations of organizations providing social assistance, formed along ideological and religious lines), voluntary associations, private law foundations, cooperatives and non-profit limited corporations.

especially as low- and middle-income countries host around 85% of the world's refugee migrants and the least developed countries, around 28% (Bahar & Dooley, 2020). Often, these countries suffer from double burdens provisioning their own citizen, as well as refugee, populations (Loescher & Milner, 2007).

At the same time, policy approaches are beginning to shift to see refugees themselves as actors in the development calculus, emphasizing the power that individual choice and community-driven solutions can have in shaping and improving local conditions of living (Betts et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2006). As refugees as a migrant group have been acknowledged for their diversity, cultural richness, autonomy and potential for mutually beneficial community contributions, insight comes into focus about how more inclusive solutions to issues of refugee governance might be driven by refugee-centric policy and activities (Bahar & Dooley, 2020). Refugees' rich human capital assets, entrepreneurial capabilities and psychological aspirations often play significant roles in capitalizing on structural breakdown points or navigating general structural difficulties to improve living conditions, as do shared ethno-national identities and strongly maintained sociocultural practices surviving traumatic migration. Refugee-centered activities found in contested, but dynamic areas of refugee life, such as refugee camps, reveal capacities for designing and reappropriating living spaces, constructing organic systems of communal governance and commerce, innovating solutions to camp problems through self-generated livelihood activities and enhancing cultural color in surrounding host communities (see, for example, Agier, 2011; Betts et al., 2016; Malkki, 1995a). After all, it is often the depoliticizing or dehumanizing nature of conditions that give way towards refugees' resistance to them and compulsion to at least attempt ways of changing them (Bradley, 2014).

Even so, inadequacies in host-country governance, as well as a lack of sustainable internationally driven intervention solutions, continue to prevail as a matter of course. Protracted conditions of refugee living become far less likely to be escaped, as the vast majority of the world's refugee migrants live within legally precarious situations for 5 years or longer, with around 25% having been displaced in host countries under restrictive or unclear living conditions for longer than 20 years (UNHCR, 2018b). Ultimately, refugees must contend with multiple layers of policy failure and exclusion to move forward with their lives to reach a seemingly banal goal: to return to the cadence of life before conflict—managing work, households, families and leisure—and simply live more like those around them.

1.2 Relevance and contribution of the research

Governmental institutional structures are uniquely inherent to these conditions and challenges of refugee life, as legal frameworks and the actors who advance them limit how refugees can apply their resources, capabilities and aspirations in rebuilding their lives in new places after events of state-driven, forced displacement. Even so, the spectrum of responses to these conditions of refugeehood can vary significantly. On one end, the most oppressive conditions can reduce refugees to collective pawns of states with little recourse to move beyond subsistence (Agamben, 1998). On the other, local and humanitarian innovation efforts enable refugees to capitalize on opportunities to independently fulfil their needs or provide new services in their communities (Betts et al., 2016).

However, there remains a gap in understanding specific local case dynamics of what might account for these differences in experiences (Betts et al., 2016, p. 185; Jacobsen, 2014), especially given that many outcomes of refugee living remain poor despite vast humanitarian endeavors of intervention. What are the ways and conditions in which refugees may or may not be empowered to take advantage of their individual capacity in response to this particular opportunity structure and enhance their means of living? Despite shifts in policy discourse and increased research on the holistic livelihoods and self-reliance of refugees, there has been less inquiry regarding how and why bottom-up innovation, community-driven change and resource-related problem solving may or may not occur within localized refugee contexts (Betts, Bloom, & Weaver, 2015). This thesis helps to add contextual dimensions to the dynamic and complex factors contributing to refugees' empowerment in moving forward with building new lives in new communities.

While policy makers ought to exercise caution in deriving comprehensive policy changes exclusively from non-representative studies (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003), such studies—like this work—can nonetheless offer foundations for further research and contribute to assessing the scope of potential issues in a specific policy context to inform more relevant solutions. As qualitative case studies utilize different localities, tools and analytical lenses often to arrive at similar conclusions, they can add to the body of accumulated and triangulated knowledge assisting with the collective generalizability of other qualitatively derived conclusions. Additionally, they can substantiate concepts from previous research on agency, opportunity structure and empowerment in various settings of refugee life.

1.2.1 Crisis or season? Germany's exceptional case of refugee migration in 2015

The primary contribution of this study is the exploration of these dynamics within the novel case study of Germany's refugee migration influx, beginning in 2015. 2015 is generally regarded as a turning point in Germany's recent refugee migration history. Since then, nearly 2 million individuals have arrived in Germany to pursue asylum claims (BAMF, 2020a), and more individuals are increasingly living in Germany with adjudicated refugee-protection statuses (*Schutzstatus*). Around 1 million individuals have received such a status in just this recent time frame. As Germany has processed the highest annual numbers of asylum applications in the history of the republic (Trines, 2017), its leaders have taken the opportunity to challenge other European Union (EU) nations to prioritize the acceptance of refugee migrants as a similar humanitarian endeavor (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016), in some ways serving as a challenge to exclusionary multinational border regimes (Guiraudon, 2017).

The German case is both sufficiently distinct and similar to provide added dimensions of insight to existing theories of refugee empowerment through a better understanding of daily refugee life in a developed nation. On the one hand, having begun in 2015, Germany's recent "long summer of migration" (Hess et al., 2017, p. 6), often labelled as a refugee crisis in contentious public parlance (Georgi, 2019; Weber, 2016), is a fairly recent sociopolitical event. It lacks the long-term term, protracted conditions of oft-studied locations such as Kenya's Dadaab or Jordan's Zaatari refugee camps. These locations house thousands of refugees in what essentially amount to semi-autonomously functioning cities, managed at national and international levels. Accommodation centers in Germany are far newer, less permanent and much smaller, as well as managed decentrally by municipalities. These distinctions point to differing degrees of potential structural flexibility that might influence the nature of refugees' life responses and outcomes.

At the same time, Germany's refugee migrants are not removed from the same types of structural difficulties as those in developing contexts, such as limitations on movement, access to the labor market and legal procedural efficiency, which also vary with regards to legal status and origin country (Kalkmann, 2019). Such restrictions can be traced back to Germany's contentious history of post-war migration policy, which has promoted migration in the name of economic growth, but shunned more inclusive structures for migrants'—and especially refugees'—holistic sociopolitical integration until recently (Joppke, 1999). As generations of past refugee- and non-refugee migrants have remained in Germany with varying degrees of compromised rights and statuses, in the face of its recent attitudes in 2015 to welcome refugee newcomers in ways antithetical to decades of response, Germany has been left to contend with a confusing and contentious discourse of sociopolitical national identity. With 26% of the current German population possessing a migration background⁸ (Destatis, 2020b) and growing numbers of foreign individuals living with precarious legal statuses or even none at all (Bommes & Wilmes, 2007; Connor & Passel, 2019), is Germany, or is it not, a country of immigration (*Einwanderungsland*) (Funk, 2016; Green, 2004, 2013; Laubenthal, 2018) that can positively subsume cultural and demographic differences into one enriched society?

⁸ Federal statistics define a migration background as an individual who was not born with German citizenship or who has at least one parent meeting these criteria (see the Glossary entry at <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Glossar/migrationshintergrund.html>).

These types of conditions imply that despite Germany's position as a world sociocultural and economic power without the problems of abject poverty or population-wide survival crises facing refugees in developing nations, a resource-rich host environment alone may not be enough to guarantee positive empowerment outcomes in refugees' lives. Providing for almost 10% of the state of North Rhine Westphalia's (NRW) refugees in a wealthy, politically progressive urban environment where nearly 40% of residents have a migration background, the city of Cologne serves as a poignant case study in which to investigate the concepts at hand. The secondary contribution of this study is thus the provision of descriptive explanations for outcomes that can justify further research in an emerging, but urgent, policy context. As the European Commission (2016a) considers them, the recent years of migration represent both an opportunity and critical need to create policies that benefit both refugees and host communities:

While the current situation of refugee inflows to the EU suggests that there is a potential for moderate economic gain ahead, downside risk appears substantial, if the required investment is not urgently undertaken to facilitate the management of flows and, for those who are granted international protection, their subsequent integration (p. 31).

As this study focuses on legal conditions and experiences of individuals migrating within asylum channels during the height of the influx years, but then living in its immediate structural aftermath a few years later, it can provide insight into early successes and failures and thus contribute to modifications moving forward. Especially as Germany has committed to moving in more inclusive refugee policy directions with some recent legal changes, knowing whether they have reached their desired ends is an applicable feedback mechanism for further future adjustments. A better understanding of current enablers and constraints on empowered ends can provide insights into how socioeconomic, political, legal, health and other gaps might be bridged between refugees and those in their new communities.

1.3 Summary of contents

As such, the purpose of this thesis is to understand and describe to what extent refugee migrants are empowered agents for change in their everyday living situations in a local case situated within the developing German context. The conceptual approach argues that the theoretical possibilities for change in these situations are tied primarily to three key areas: 1) the assets and capabilities refugees have at their disposal (agency); 2) the governmental institutional conditions that define the use of assets through the bounds of daily living (opportunity structure) and 3) the ways these previous factors interact to enable or constrain the presence, use and achievement of choice in building new lives (empowerment). Differences in possible outcomes stem from the interactions of adequacy or deficiency in these interconnected areas across legal, economic and sociocultural areas of daily living.

1.3.1 Central research questions

To this end, this thesis poses the primary research question: to what extent are refugees empowered in their daily lives to improve and overcome legal, economic and sociocultural challenges that governmental institutional structures create? The central research question includes the related sub-questions:

- 1) What is the current context of Germany's recent influx of refugee migration, beginning in 2015?
- 2) What is the nature of the legal governance structures and provisioning channels shaping the bounds of refugees' daily living experiences?
- 3) How do these structures influence refugees in defining, accumulating and using their assets and capabilities to address their needs and aspirations?
- 4) What specific actions and choices are refugees empowered to undertake (or not) in order to address the challenges and shortcomings associated with their status as refugees?

1.3.2 Chapter overview

In order to answer these research questions and better understand these nuanced interplays, this work presents a qualitative case study of agency, opportunity structure and empowerment for change using a local context of daily refugee life in Cologne, Germany. The case study is grounded within the experiences of refugee migrants primarily living in four refugee shelters and key actors comprising municipal refugee governance structures, along with documentary support explaining the parameters of these structures. The thesis begins with this current introductory chapter, outlining the key problems driving the research questions, the research contributions and an abridged summary of the complete contents below.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical concepts and framework used to structure and analyze the research questions. Although life possibilities are frequently constrained in contexts of refugee living across the world, how and to what extent these constraints exist varies across cases. As such, this chapter explains the theoretical concepts underlying these differences and presents the related conceptual framework used to analyze outcomes in the case-study context. The chapter begins by exploring the state-driven, theoretical constructions of “the refugee” figure, arguing that its sociopolitical positioning inherently underlies negatively manifested outcomes of refugee living. Because “the refugee” is a construction of states, refugees exist within a distinct governmental, legal institutional context that uniquely influences the material and immaterial resources at their disposal to drive desired outcomes in their own lives. This line of argument underlies the theoretical premise of how I cast the main research problem, namely, that exclusionary top-down governance structures are a fundamentally constraining influence on refugees' life possibilities when viewed from their bottom-up perspectives. In other words, the more that state biopolitical power positions refugees as outsiders, threats or mass collectives that must be excluded—intentionally or otherwise—from the broader social order, the more that individual action at the micro-level is inherently constrained within those structures. At the same time, specific possibilities for action and response are contextually dependent and demand analysis of the component parts of legal governance structures and individual resources.

As such, the chapter then presents the conceptual framework used to analyze these components in a German case of everyday refugee living. The established framework conceptualizes the interaction of individual agency and opportunity structure as empowerment: individuals are empowered for change in their life choices not merely when the opportunity for choice exists, but when they are logistically able to use it effectively. This is possible when the opportunity structure—the institutions bounding behavior—supports individuals in fruitfully exerting their agency, that is, applying their material and immaterial assets and capabilities to reach desired goals. Given refugees' unique relationship to state governance structures, this work focuses the discussion of opportunity structure within legal and governmental bounds. Just as poverty and power are multidimensional, so too is empowerment, as agency, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes can manifest differently across domains of life (legal, economic or social), as well as at various levels of social-organizational structure (macro, meso or micro). With its capability to examine the complexity of these interplays, the framework can increase understanding about governance structures and refugees' responses to provide greater insight into improving their living conditions and opportunities for social participation, benefitting themselves and their new communities.

Chapter 3 reviews the empirical conditions and possibilities for empowerment across cases of refugee living, examining in literature how individual qualities of refugee living and being (i.e., agency) help refugees to contend with unique legal and governmental conditions (i.e., opportunity structure) and make their individual choices more relevant (i.e., empowered). Empirically looking across international cases of refugees' experiences, the chapter first reviews specific driving factors of empowerment outcomes. Refugee living spaces tend to be highly nuanced arenas of being in which refugees' actions, participations and manipulations of social, economic and political conditions of their living are observable to some degree, even if limited or highly conditional on circumstance. Structural opening points for change tend to converge on either experiencing more overt legal inclusivity in general or taking advantage of break down points in the

implementation and cohesion of policy. Certain components of agency—such as the right circumstantial collection of human capital (ex., language or professional) skills, cohesive social networks, shared cultural knowledge and psychological hope—can influence how such opening points may be addressed or navigated. Although indicators of well-being reveal nearly universal conditions in which refugees are worse off than other types of migrants or citizens, the most optimal empowerment conditions align structural support to elements of refugees' agency, including their preferences aspirations, as well as the local conditions in which they live. When refugees themselves lack the resources or structural, legal positioning to be able to reach an end, they may capitalize on other actors who can act as intermediaries to bridge such deficiencies.

After discussing this spectrum of experience internationally, the chapter introduces the German case, offering a brief history of post-war German refugee policy and contextualizing the recent influx of refugee migration beginning in 2015. Providing various statistics and reviewing existing research on agency and institutional elements defining and shaping the German refugee experience at country and municipal levels, the chapter examines how German refugee migrants may be broadly positioned to be empowered or not. This review, rooted in the context of German integration measures, suggests that in Germany, refugee migrants' material and immaterial resources at hand are not entirely deprived, but that governing opportunity structures remain closed to entry points for refugee-driven situational manipulation and complex in their administration. Civil society or local governance actors are better positioned to act as intermediaries and interlocutors, often more empowered than refugees to fill in resource or structural gaps when governmental institutions are inadequate. As such, the study's empirical chapters draw from this baseline review to examine how these existing conditions pertaining to Germany's refugee migrants overall manifest more specifically for the individual participants in the study's municipal context.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methods and data collection approaches used to do so, explaining the rationale and processes behind them. The chapter clarifies the data analysis process, which uses a conceptual coding template based on a combination of concept-driven indicators found in literature and data-grounded themes. It also discusses associated challenges, particularly with language use and field access, as well as the ethical standards required to do research with a vulnerable population of participants.

It also provides detail on the data input. The study utilizes three types of qualitative case-study data from Cologne, Germany: documents to include federal, state and municipal legal texts, government publications, indicator data and secondary literature; semi-structured and conversational interviews with experts and refugee migrant families and individuals; and participant observation of life in four refugee shelters between May 2017 and May 2018. In total, the data includes semi-structured interviews with 48 experts and 16 refugee migrant families or individuals; conversational interviews with 12 additional refugee migrant families or individuals; and 234 pages of field notes documenting observations of shelter life, volunteer gatherings and local government-sponsored events related to refugee migration and integration. The entry point of focus is the level of refugee migrant residents living in refugee shelters⁹ and their experiences dealing with the day-to-day governance operating environment of asylum migration structures, supplemented by the perspectives of the governance actors they encounter. These various actors and experts include local government representatives, municipal employees, TSO leaders, social workers, security personnel and shelter volunteers. As such, the interviews from these types of individuals reveal insights not only about the functioning of their own positions and work in the refugee governance context, but also considerations of their experiences and perceptions interacting with refugee migrants at various stages of the asylum-seeking process. Reflecting the diverse reality of shelter life, interviews with shelter residents from 12 different countries also include variation in asylum case timelines, adjudicated legal status, family structures and socioeconomic backgrounds. All participants in the study lived in Cologne with residency statuses related to the asylum-seeking processes.

⁹ Although three refugee individuals were living in private apartments at the time of interview, all had spent the majority of their time in Germany living in refugee shelters and could speak from this perspective.

Beginning with Chapter 5, the empirical chapters concentrate on how lived experiences of both refugees and governance actors manifest within the structural and resource dynamics of a local case and explore the answers to the primary research questions. To accomplish this, the empirical chapters are organized thematically by the domain of empowerment (legal, economic and sociocultural). It should be noted that the organization of chapters is not meant to imply strict rigidity between domains or empowerment drivers. Rather, these separations are done organizationally and functionally in line with the framework in order to have a more comprehensible means with which to analyze and discuss the contributing factors at hand. Additionally, more detailed stories of participants are profiled at the chapters' beginnings (as well as opening and closing the manuscript) in order to highlight the interconnectedness of these areas. The profiles' themes repeat across chapters and demonstrate their inherently intersecting qualities, despite situationally drawing attention to certain legal, economic or sociocultural challenges that some participants' stories highlight more saliently.

To optimize clarity in organization, each chapter follows the same structural format. After highlighting a relevant participant profile, the chapters first discuss the key domain-related elements of individual agency, that is, the assets, resources and capabilities that refugee participants are found to have or lack and what they are seeking to expand in this regard. This micro-level of inquiry focuses on the individual refugee participants' experiences facing, enduring and overcoming challenges within their immediate living settings, as well as those of similar local individuals referenced generally within interview, conversational and documentary contexts. Next, to outline the legal opportunity structure in which assets can be used, the chapters present an overview of the relevant governmental frameworks and laws shaping the application of agency. Except where noted, information about these frameworks refers to their status during the time of fieldwork (May 2017 to 2018). These overviews are not detailed legal histories or textual analyses of legal language. Rather, using content from legal documents and secondary literature, as well as interview perspectives from local governance actors, they present grounding in the legal basis for what is structurally permissible and provided, at least on paper. Following, more detailed discussion focuses on the implementation and on-the-ground manifestation of these frameworks, particularly emphasizing the content from expert interviews regarding how local governance actors execute them along the lines of the framework's dimensions and how they shape the local legal operating environment for refugees in Cologne generally, but also the refugee participants specifically. Because the entry point of work is neither the local government office nor the civil society group, detailed, underlying mechanisms and theories behind their internal functions are not the primary focus of the work's analysis. Rather, I characterize these actors and functions within the context of the framework, that is, how they represent qualities and executional components of the opportunity structure that make refugee participants' agency straightforward or difficult to apply to reach the choices they seek. Finally, the chapters close with analysis and evaluation as to the degree of empowerment present within the domain, reflecting on the presence, use and achievement of choice and relating how the refugees in the study context benefit and suffer from agency and opportunity structure working either in conjunction with or opposition to one another. Qualities and outcomes are grounded within the participants' and experts' experiences and discussed more generally when applicable.¹⁰

Chapter 5 discusses empowerment outcomes in the legal domain. Empowerment in the legal domain is productively and inclusively interacting with the mechanisms of government-body processes and the explicit legal rights and participatory statuses afforded through them. For refugees more broadly, as well as the participants more specifically, empowerment as legal actors is highly varied, dependent on the parameters of complex legal statuses that are frequently changing. Legal status in and of itself thus becomes a valuable asset. Although participants attempt to grow and apply their agency in the form of seeking

¹⁰ Examples of such generalizations include when specific laws, local indicator data or living conditions apply to larger groups of people (ex., all refugee migrants in Cologne, refugee clients working with a service center, shelter residents, etc.) or interviewees similarly report on more broadly applicable referenced trends, situations or observations.

informational assets about their asylum claims or status, this is often contingent upon difficult-to-obtain discretionary financial assets to pay for translators, legal councilors and lawyers. The bureaucracy, lengthiness of administration processes and frequent change in evaluation parameters are also seen at the executional level of opportunity structure, in which local governance actors must change support offerings to meet demands from those at levels above them, but contend with high levels of situational management discretion when a lack of clarity exists. In the legal domain, empowerment for participants is most clearly possible with the most permissive legal statuses, which afford not only the clearest rights and channels to participate in key social activities, but also legal stability and related psychological confidence coming with it to feel more motivated to undertake the efforts needed to pursue these activities. At the same time, their interactions within legal systems are still bureaucratic, as appeal processes, court involvement and dealings with local bureaucrats can be hurdles moving forward. Intermediaries thus play a key role in overcoming these obstacles, more so when legal status is less certain. Often acting as political lobbyists to change certain structural conditions, individual advocates to influence case outcomes or situational decision-makers to execute discretion in legal interpretations, volunteers, social workers or sympathetic government case workers are often better positioned to intervene on the participants' behalf to advance political or legal aims, frequently acting as their communicative (linguistic) or participatory (politically procedural) voice.

Chapter 6 discusses empowerment outcomes in the economic domain. Empowerment in the economic domain is moving on to find new means to sustain life, that is, to participate in the consumption of goods and build a stable livelihood in the broadest sense. Empowerment as economic actors is constrained, in the generalized sense that all refugees conduct economic life within a system of cyclical and systematic institutional complexities that offer ongoing material support to avoid destitute poverty, but as highlighted within the local context, can make individual advancement and independence difficult to obtain in practicality. More specifically, the nature of assets that participants have and what they seek to pursue are changing with the nature of crisis and the needs that evolve with it. As emergency conditions have largely passed, rote destitution is a decreased concern, meaning that the participants are seeking agency in the form of more complex and existential assets—such as language skills, stable jobs and the psychological confidence that comes with them—with which to move towards holistic economic independence, as well as the rebuilding of identities often tied towards their professional experiences or desires. The opportunity structure is not necessarily fully enabling them towards this end, as its complexity challenges executional effectiveness, although it is fundamentally humanitarian in accounting for their basic needs of material survival. As in the legal domain, where voice and power come from other channels, civil society or local governmental actors are more empowered to act on behalf of the participants to navigate institutional challenges in economic-related endeavors such as finding training programs and obtaining relevant jobs. They also act as key channels for language learning, a primary human capital asset that participants consider critical in the pursuit of moving forward in this regard.

Chapter 7 discusses empowerment outcomes in the sociocultural domain. Empowerment in the sociocultural domain means being able to engage in customary domestic or relational practices as individuals, families or other networked communities of people. Constraints on empowerment possibilities are present in both areas of agency and opportunity structure. As in other domains, the desire to move beyond subsistence—into a home that can be managed and a community that can be welcoming— is a central agency-related goal of the participants living in shelters, the difficult physical conditions of which are also explored through their living experiences as agency detriments. Shelters are diverse and rudimentary, where homemaking resources can be difficult to gather and residents are too distinct from one another to be seen as social assets. They share the broad, state-defined condition of refugeehood, but it is not a salient enough commonality to overcome differences in psychological, material, legal and human capital resources that impede relationship development and organizational capacity. Further, the municipal codes and policies governing shelter life are administered through complex, top-down systems with little room for residents'

direct input. Without channels to reliably participate in shelter life together, residents from the field shelters do not consider shelter spaces as communities or homes and are thus not incentivized or empowered to improve their living conditions together. A real home and place in an external community are components of agency that are sought instead, but difficult to achieve individually. As in legal and economic domains, power for change rests more with intermediary actors like volunteers, who possess more positional flexibility to change conditions of shelter life through service offerings or lobbied improvements, move residents out of shelters and foster social connections to German networks. Despite these interactions, shelter residents in the study context are situationally empowered to find individual ways to use what is around them to prioritize family values and some elements of homemaking. Even within rudimentary shelter conditions, they often find improvised ways to decorate their shelter spaces or modify furniture arrangements to be more familiar, celebrate the rites of religious holidays, host culturally significant events like engagement parties, cook familiar foods or engage in former rituals of domesticity (for example, always having home-cooked sweets, tea and small meals to offer volunteers stopping by, in line with cultural customs). Moving slowly back towards these familiar daily cadences of living reveals what power the participants have to choose to combat turbulence with culturally meaningful elements of normalcy. For many, finding a private home in which these types of activities can be pursued with greater freedom is thus seen as an ideal outcome of choice, although private homes at all, much less with the most desired qualities, remain difficult to come by.

The final chapter summarizes the work in its entirety. It recalls the whole body of research, relating key findings from the study and German context back to the conceptual underpinnings of the work and empirical outcomes in other cases of refugee living. It reiterates the importance of understanding the relationships between agency, opportunity structure and empowerment in improving the lives of refugees. With this, it provides recommendations and directives for applicable policy modifications, as well as future research in the context of refugee, migration and development studies.

2. Framing Agency and Institutional Conditions for Empowerment: A Conceptual Approach

Refugees—individuals fleeing to escape a well-founded fear of persecution—are always migrants, that is, people who have moved away from their habitual place of residence irrespective of legal status, cause, duration or voluntary choice (UN, 2019). Migrants are created when people simply leave a place of residence for another. But governmental institutional structures are uniquely inherent to the essence of refugee life, legislating it into distinction: the category of refugee is legally manufactured through the institutional constructs of states, the sociopolitical conflicts between them and the trajectories that refugees as members of this constructed group are entitled to pursue in response.

Unfortunately, this distinction is frequently manifested as life relegated to the margins of society: across the world, refugees suffer from poorer conditions of health, finances, rights and socioeconomic opportunities compared to both citizens of the countries they live in, as well as other types of documented migrants (Jacobsen, 2014). At the same time, the spectrum of responses to these distinctions of refugeehood can vary significantly. On one end, the most oppressive conditions reduce refugees to collective pawns of states with little recourse to move beyond bodily subsistence (Agamben, 1998). On the other, local and humanitarian innovation efforts enable refugees to capitalize on opportunities to independently fulfill their needs or provide new services in their communities, closing socioeconomic and political gaps between them and other non-refugees (Betts, Bloom, & Omata, 2012). Perhaps the functional ideal for refugee life is something more banal; simply living everyday life within conditions that differ less from those around them, with more equitable chances to begin life again and reasonable expectations that protection from persecution brings opportunities for life greater than what exists when living under threat. In reality, however, these differences in experiences and outcomes still exist, but how can they be better and more contextually understood? The purpose of this chapter is thus to explain the theoretical concepts underlying this question and present the related conceptual framework used to analyze it within a case study of everyday refugee life in the German context.

The first section explores the theoretical constructions of “the refugee” figure, arguing that its sociopolitical positioning inherently underlies the often negatively manifested outcomes of refugee living: because “the refugee” is a construction of states, refugees exist within a distinct governmental institutional context that uniquely influences the material and immaterial resources at their disposal to drive desired outcomes in their own lives. As such, the more that biopolitical executions of state power positions refugees as outsiders, threats or mass collectives that must be excluded—intentionally or otherwise—from the broader social order, the more the use of resources is constrained within this order, correspondingly reducing choice-driven outcomes for change. At the same time, the organization, strength and functioning of this institutional order also varies, and individuals’ daily life activities and responses to these variants, voids and inadequacies around them may also reveal avenues for inclusion and overcoming. These possibilities are contextually dependent and demand analysis of the component parts driving situational outcomes.

As refugees act within the institutions that constrain them, they also act upon them as social participants. This highlights the role of agent-structure feedback mechanisms that drive these situational outcomes. The second section explores these mechanisms deeper within the context of a demonstrated conceptual framework allowing for the analysis of context-specific factors contributing to different outcomes in situations of refugee living. The framework conceptualizes that empowerment for change in constraining circumstances is the outcome when individuals can better accumulate assets and utilize their capabilities to more fruitfully execute the choices they deem valuable in the fundamental sense of pursuing well-being (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 5), but also to better “participate in, negotiate with, influence,

control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives” in the inclusive sense of taking part in society (Narayan, 2002, p. 14). In other words, the possibilities for refugees to respond to and change the unique conditions of their daily lives are thus primarily tied to three key areas: 1) the assets and capabilities refugees have at their disposal (agency); 2) the institutional conditions that define the use of these assets and capabilities in the bounds of daily living (opportunity structure) and 3) the ways these factors interact to enable or constrain executing choices in building new lives (empowerment). Differences in outcomes stem from the interactions of adequacy or deficiency in these highly interconnected areas.

As such, the section further expands on the specific applications of agency and opportunity structure that drive empowerment, used within the study context to identify factors influencing participants’ choices for living. Agency refers to the material and immaterial assets and capabilities available with which to make choices and form goals, which are based on evolving needs and evaluations of well-being. The institutional conditions that define how agency may be acquired and used are the opportunity structure. Given the unique relationship of refugeehood to top-down, state-driven constructs, an emphasis on governmental institutional structures is a practical focus to understand the dynamics of refugee life. Empowerment, then, is the outcome of these interactions in reaching and executing desired choices. Individuals are empowered not merely when the opportunity for choice exists, but when they are actually able to use it to effectively achieve the ends they seek. Reflecting the diverse components of agency and opportunity structure, empowerment and its components are similarly multidimensional and can manifest differently across categories of experiences. These differences occur cross the organizational domains (political-legal, economic or social) and levels (macro, meso or micro) of life in that what is valued, necessary or permissible in one domain or at one level may be less so in another, especially at various points in time.

Despite the limitations of the overall conceptual approach, addressed throughout the chapter, knowing more about the inadequacies of governmental structures defining refugees’ lives and the types of individual action in response can provide greater insight not only into improving the well-being of refugees, but in turn, the holistic functioning of host nations. When refugees are empowered towards fuller participation in society life, both refugees and communities experience mutual benefits. When they are not, they experience greater degrees of physical suffering, cycles of poverty and protracted dependency that strain provisioning schemes and can lead to societal conflict. Ultimately, this chapter aims to discuss the theoretical and conceptual components driving capacity for change and demonstrate how the application of a specific empowerment framework can analyze conditions influencing outcomes in cases of refugee living.

2.1 Theorizing the sociopolitical construction of refugees and corresponding life possibilities

Protection against so-called outsiders has long justified the specific conditions under which states sanction population movement within and across borders in the name of sovereignty (Carens, 1987). As conflict in and between states advances these notions of what constitutes an insider versus an outsider—what must be eliminated in order to be protected—the number of people displaced as a result continues to grow. As individuals are compelled into movement through a threat to their very right to life, they act as challengers to conditional migration paradigms, suggesting a channel of movement that should perhaps be unconditional instead. The extent to which states comply with this notion defines the consistently contentious processes and outcomes of refugee policymaking (Zetter, 1991). As such, the theories exploring the construction, position and implications of “the refugee” as a sociopolitical figure are relevant to examine first, as they fundamentally underlie the nature of life possibilities defining the experiences of refugeehood.

2.1.1 Refugeehood and its distinction of migration experience

Like any movement of people, movement in response to persecution is migration. All refugees are migrants, fundamentally. As the understanding of multidimensional aspects of poverty, marginalization and social power imbalances deepens, so too does the knowledge of the “messy social realities” that influence

the backgrounds and motivations driving matters of socioeconomic mobility and migration decisions (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017, p. 50). Indeed, especially where destitution is endemic, it can even seem as if the non-refugee residents in a place “[come] second, if at all,” as they, too, can suffer from competition for food, work, wages, services and common property resources when living near large populations of refugees (Chambers, 1986, p. 246). Given these premises, and that notions of what constitutes forced displacement “are used in different senses at different times” within movement trajectories (Bakewell, 2011, p. 18), it is necessary to first understand how “the refugee” is positioned to become a sociopolitical figure distinct from other types of migrants, with related experiences of refugeehood that are meaningful to explore.

The primary argument questioning the relevancy of such categorization focusses on the multifaceted nature of the general migration experience, which spans time, location, direction and goals (Collyer & Haas, 2012). In this way, migration is driven by more fluid motivational factors resting on a spectrum of reactionary to proactive (Richmond, 1988), but also always involves some combination of individual compulsion and choice (Scalettaris, 2007; Turton, 2003). As such, intrinsic distinctions between more or less voluntary movements—“between the refugee and the so-called ‘economic migrant’”—are rarely clear (Loescher et al., 2003, p. 40). More reactionary migration in particular has historically originated from diverse causes resulting in “qualitatively different situations and predicaments,” suggesting that a “refugee” is not an inherent “kind or type of person” that exists based upon naturalistic criteria (Malkki, 1995b, p. 496).

As the nature of any migration decision encompasses “the making and remaking of one’s own life on the scenery of the world,” refugees are like any other individuals who move, seeking to escape the past and engage in processes of new becoming by “reconstitute[ing] themselves in the course of participating in, and changing, the conditions of their material existence” (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2007, p. 225, 223). In other words, the essence of all migration comes down to engaging in a self-preserving activity driven by the “diffuse anxiety generated by a failure of the social system to provide for the fundamental needs of the individual, biological, economic and social” (Richmond, 1993, p. 10). Indeed, as “much displacement today is driven by a combination of intrastate conflict, poor governance and political instability, environment change and resource scarcity” (Zetter, 2015, p. 1), the experiences, decisions and needs of all migrating individuals rarely fit into a “neutral ordering process like [...] a series of colored buckets,” despite the intent of state institutional structures that attempt to do just that in the name of migration management (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017, p. 49; see also, Collyer & Haas, 2012; Scalettaris, 2007).

Even so, the issue with this argument is that it fails to fully acknowledge the implications of these existing political schemes, even if it challenges their theoretical relevancy. Academics and policy makers ought to question whether or not such schemes do or should build distinctions in ways that accurately account for the diverse motivations and intersecting elements of migration in general. But the refugee experience can be examined in its own right specifically due to the reality of these currently manufactured distinctions. The experiences of refugees can be treated as distinct because state governmental institutions make them distinct. Such institutionally derived categories and distinctions are an “ingrained and largely inevitable mode through which migrants as research participants, political subjects and social subjects are configured, including through their own modes of representation” (Robertson, 2018, p. 5).

Refugees’ distinction stems precisely from this “particular legal status and position vis-à-vis the state” (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, & Omata, 2016, p. 46). Migrants, in the most basic sense, are created when people simply leave a place of residence for another, irrespective of the formality of states or borders. But refugees exist only when people are persecuted or targeted by states and other states are expected to respond in uniquely state-driven ways. Indeed, the concept of modern, post-war refugeehood is a state-invented categorization, created when the UN explicitly defined in 1951 the “right of persons to seek asylum from persecution” as universally worthy category of explicit protections (Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, p. 2). Originating as a response to the atrocities of World War II and the related failures of post-World War I, 1930s migration regimes to mitigate them, this notion of “refugeehood”

was largely manufactured as a political tool of Western states that moved away from the acknowledgement of motivational fluidity in migration decisions and the generalized need of protection for politically disenfranchised groups that had been more prevalent in international migration policies between the late 1800s and late 1920s (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018, p. 389–90; Long, 2013, p. 5–7).

From the perspective of states, the notion of unconditional refugee migration in the name of humanitarian ideals is frequently seen as a threat to sovereignty or national interest, casting the refugee as a specific sociopolitical threat to order. As growing numbers of forcibly displaced people challenge the meaning of migrating out of choice or force and motivations for movement become less clear, states have increasingly instituted “complex system[s] of civic stratifications and migration management” to avoid overtaxing the resources and benefits that may come with offering generous forms of humanitarian reception (Ek, 2006, p. 370). “Crisis” discourse has thus begun to permeate these management systems, compelling states to rely on “binary distinctions between what is orderly and desirable and what is out of the ordinary and in need of rectification” to protect state interests (Cantat, 2016, p. 13). States set forth criteria for entry or membership into the community of inclusion under schemes of proactive migration, which a non-refugee migrant either meets or does not; there is an offer for a job, an admission to an institute for education, the presence of a previously established family member. These are the orderly, desirable criteria that can be objectively met and may threaten sovereignty paradigms less, especially as they are often rooted in notions of migrants’ potential productivity, profitability or potential financial worth (Cantat, 2016, p. 16).

Refugees, on the other hand—reactive and potentially less predictable in terms of how they might ultimately integrate within their gaining states (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018; Witteborn, 2011, p. 1148)—are out of the ordinary, as states simultaneously manufacture their construction to address their exceptional circumstances and then evaluate the validity of these constructions against themselves. Through these state mechanisms, refugees must be “cleared as being worthy” and evaluated subjectively as to whether or not their claims meet a threshold necessary to preserve their human dignity and very right to life (Witteborn, 2011, p. 1144). The refugee category is distinct because “the body [itself] is regulated through legal and sociopolitical practices” (Witteborn, 2011, p. 1144), with states determining the very “access to the category of ‘the human’” (Zylinska, 2004, p. 526). As a result, the institutional “structural determinants of life chances which this [refugee] identity engenders” make the category itself prone to distinction (Zetter, 1991, p. 39).

Unlike other types of legalized migration channels, which often involve explicit purpose of making immediate contributions to gaining communities (for example, through education or work), the presumed impermanence of refugeehood (Nyers, 2013, p. 8) means that refugees are “are systematically prevented from opportunities to establish any irreversible social foundations that could hinder their removal or deportation in case of rejection” (Liedtke, 2016, p. 495). To do so, states manipulate legal and policy frameworks to tightly control access to rights, benefits and resources (such as housing, food, income and social assistance) relating to the regulation and ease of day-to-day living, creating highly constrained spaces for life “in which a state of highly conditional hospitality is imposed upon the guest” (Darling, 2009, p. 656). In other words, the refugee is a sociopolitical creation of states, which, in this case, act as “laboratories for altering human nature” to literally create new types of people forced to live in exclusionary conditions (Owens, 2009, p. 575 citing Arendt, 1958). While altered labeling of migrant categories might be ultimately relevant for more effective policy in theory (Collyer & Haas, 2012; Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; Zetter, 1991, 2015), even Malkki (1995, p. 496) concedes that the category of refugee is still inherently a “legal or descriptive rubric” that can distinguish individuals from one another in an operational sense.

In so far as they relate to actual experiences, the administration of these labels, benefits and restrictions can lead to drastically different outcomes between those migrating through refugee as opposed to other channels in gaining countries, in which benefits may be greater and restrictions less severe. States, individually and collectively, use the rubric to determine who is worthy of a specific subset of migration-related legal benefits and how they are dispensed (Zetter, 1991, 2007). Resulting outcomes from these

benefits and restrictions frequently reveal gaps in the spectrum of life possibilities for refugees as opposed to other types of documented migrants. Even over 15- to 20-year timeframes, for example, non-refugee migrants in many places across the world generally maintain higher income and employment rates than refugees that become far less distinguishable from (if not equal to) native-born individuals (see, for example, Bevelander, 2016; Connor, 2010). The same differences also often apply in measures of mental and physical health; while non-refugee migrants converge in health status to native-born individuals over time, refugee migrants continue to have worse health outcomes (Giuntella, Kone, Ruiz, & Vargas-Silva, 2018). Many of these outcomes or differences can be linked to specific aspects of the refugee-channel migration experience—such as aggravation of trauma, the general inability to return home and protracted legal uncertainty—that those migrating through other channels may not experience so acutely (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018). Although these trends are not completely universal across all cases, nor disparities between migrant and native groups ubiquitously wide in every iteration, refugees are nonetheless globally faced with limited options to secure protection, autonomy and legal certainty. As a result, refugees are frequently relegated to protracted encampment (where average stays around the world approach 20 years), urban destitution or dangerous journeys, frequently succumbing to legal irregularity to merely have hope for survival (Betts & Collier, 2017, p. 8–9). Under these constructions, unlike other migrants, refugees are not afforded the same protections or benefits as insiders, but they nonetheless become subject to the state’s authority and restrictions in all elements of their existence (Arendt, 1958, p. 301–2; Nyers, 2013, p. xiii). This paradox shows that refugees “occupy a distinctive institutional context” because they exist within a governing institutional structure that leads them to “suffer from a simultaneous absence and surfeit of statehood,” unlike those around them, within the so-called normal order (Betts et al., 2016, p. 46, 50).

The refugee migrant distinction may be constructed, but it is a reality of sociopolitical organization with specific consequences for life remaking. Even Scalettaris (2007) acknowledges that “what concretely distinguishes refugees from other migrants is precisely the fact of being labelled as such;” because the label commands certain treatments and legal obligations, “the refugee status may have relevant implications for identity and have powerful social effects” in specific settings where these state-prescribed bounds function, separate or treat refugees (as opposed to other non-native residents) in very particular ways (p. 40). Ignoring states’ roles in “shaping the flows and life chances of mobile persons” neglects these defining effects of policy (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018, p. 389). As Hathaway (2007) puts it, “in the real world, legal status—and the rights that go with various forms of legal status—routinely identify and constitute fundamental social and political categories” (p. 350). Although the general, fluid nature of migration ought to feed debates about crafting more relevant policies, existing migrant categorizations of states are still organizational and political realities that can have profound effects on the lives of those individuals living within them.

2.1.2 State positioning of refugeehood and the influence on individual action

If the refugee is a unique and distinct creation of states, it follows that the very condition of “being a refugee” conceptually places refugees in an institutionally distinctive position” (Betts et al., 2016, p. 9). As such, how these legal and governmental structures position refugees specifically plays a critical role in examining when, why and to what degree they may access and control various resources around them and propel change in response to their circumstances. Theories of this relational positioning posit that the more that legal structures cohesively or imperviously situate refugees as outsiders, threats or mass collectives that must be excluded—intentionally or otherwise—from the broader social order, the more that individualism and choice-driven outcomes for change are constrained within those structures. At the same time, as survival compels the ingenuity of human activity and creative problem solving, a focus on the everyday activities that are actually occurring within daily life can also identify avenues for different types of social participation and overcoming, reveal the actual extent of institutional inclusion or exclusion in practice and better understand mechanisms for enabling greater degrees of choice within living circumstances.

2.1.2.1 *The exclusion of biopolitics*

Fundamentally, as the nature of the refugee's plight becomes institutionally disregarded by systems in their repressive execution, possibilities for substantive life remaking are heavily restricted. When states exert an ongoing, overabundance of exclusion in shaping conditions of refugeehood, the refugee can become lost in a collective body the state seeks to reject. Hannah Arendt's post-World War II work presents a theoretical foundation for how this low threshold capacity for change is inherently tied to state legal structures and can be so pervasively and negatively perpetuated in the refugee context, depending on the severity and degree of state control. Iterative political processes evolve to promote the exclusion of specific groups through imperial power arrangements in which "everything is permitted" that is "tied to the utilitarian motives and self-interest of the rulers" (Arendt, 1958, p. 440). In other words, according to Owens' (2009) summary of the argument, "everything is permitted in the name of national security, the right of territorial sovereignty and to protect the way of life of 'normal' citizens; everything is permitted including the elimination and degradation of individuals and whole groups" (p. 575). As such, states superimpose rejection, statelessness and other exclusionary classifications onto "undesireables" such as refugees (Arendt, 1958, p. 445), further emphasizing state power, superiority and ultimately the fact that state "sovereignty is nowhere more absolute than in matters of emigration, naturalization, nationality, and expulsion" (p. 278). Casting these groups as threats (Ek, 2006, p. 370), the state reinforces its power to determine these matters of physical and organizational inclusion or exclusion—and in many cases, life or death (Arendt, 1958, p. 301).

Michel Foucault further conceptualizes this extreme relationship between the state and the (undesireable refugee) body as biopolitics. Literally understood as the state's "power over life" (Zembylas, 2010, p. 35), biopolitics embodies how the state's regulatory instruments of institutional policy are used to "foster life or disallow it to the point of death" (Foucault, 1978, p. 138), in so far as the state perpetuates mechanisms of power to regulate and control the "life processes" of its population (p. 142). As such, the state's power increasingly becomes "the right to intervene to make live" (Foucault, 2003, p. 248). The right to make live in turn justifies the state's defense of society and preventative action to protect the well-being of the population it determines to be its own, justifying excluding (or killing) those outsiders identified as "the other" (Zembylas, 2010, p. 35). Straightforwardly, according to Foucault, "if you want to live, the other must die" (Foucault, 2003, p. 255). In line with Arendt's arguments, exclusion, even in the extreme form of killing, becomes justified in the name of security, resulting in the state perpetuating "binary categorization between 'us' and 'them', or between the 'normal' (e.g., legitimate citizens) and the 'abnormal' (e.g., illegal immigrants, unqualified refugees or bogus asylum seekers)" (Zembylas, 2010, p. 35).

Giorgio Agamben further posits the condition of refugeehood may embody the most extreme form of biopolitical exclusion, placing refugee life within a "state of exception"—that is, an "extreme form of relation [to the sovereign] by which something is included solely through its exclusion"—which inherently and severely restricts possibilities for any substantive life remaking (Agamben, 1998, p. 14). Refugees, cast as threats by the states that expell them and rejected from acceptance as threats by the states they flee to, "are included in the discourse of 'normality' and 'order' only by virtue of their exclusion from the normal identities and ordered spaces of the sovereign state" (Nyers, 2013, p. xiii). This inclusive exclusion, Agamben argues, disembodies the biological fact of living (*Zoē*) from life within the more sophisticated way of sociopolitical "living proper" (*Bios*), resulting in bare or naked life (Agamben, 1998, p. 4). Bare life means that physical life (*Zoē*) itself is so "politicized through abandonment and/or exposure to sovereign violence," that the refugee is devolved to a rightless existence outside the realm of recognized humanity (Ek, 2006, p. 366), "through juridical procedures and deployments of power" (Agamben, 1998, p. 110). The sovereign thus becomes justified in excluding refugees to living a primal life, in which "only the bare minimum is permitted," and "every gesture is conditioned by the power of the sovereign and each gesture acts to reproduce that power" (Darling, 2009, p. 656).

Refugee life, especially within the confines of refugee camps, becomes then “the most absolute biopolitical space [...] in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation,” insofar “as its inhabitants [are] stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life” (Agamben, 1998, p. 110). For Agamben, the constructed essence of refugeehood is an ironic “paradox” that places a fundamental, intrinsic limit on empowered choice because the refugee is:

[...] precisely the figure that should have embodied human rights more than any other [...]. The conception of human rights based on the supposed existence of a human being as such, Arendt tells us, proves to be untenable as soon as those who profess it find themselves confronted for the first time with people who have really lost every quality and every specific relation, except for the pure fact of being human. [...] That there is no autonomous space in the political order of the nation-state for something like the pure human in itself is evident at the very least from the fact that, even in the best of cases, the status of refugee has always been considered a temporary condition that ought to lead either to naturalization or to repatriation. [...] A stable statue for the human in itself is inconceivable in the law of the nation-state (Agamben, 2000, p. 30–1).

This exclusionary positioning explains how state constructions may arise to cast refugees as parasitic threats against the resources and rights of a state’s own (Zylinska, 2004). The possibility of exerting individuality and choice for refugees, who are positioned both inside and outside the normal order, is thus highly dependent on this extent of exclusion. In practical terms, these exclusionary structures manifest in ways that explicitly restrict the day-to-day cadence of life; they limit refugees in terms of where they can live, where they can move, what they can own, how they can work, how they can be educated, how they can receive healthcare and even how they can be protected (Jacobsen, 2002). For the millions of refugees who are forced to live in camps, literal fences physically separate and quarantine refugees to “create distinction between those inside [...] and those outside” (Kreichauf, 2018, p. 4). Refugees’ access to the material and immaterial goods necessary for improved well-being thus becomes overly tied to the “mercy” of the state, which tightly controls access to resources and rights to prevent a burdensome, extraneous or unwanted population from becoming too comfortable in its host (Darling 2009, p. 656). This presumed “campization” of refugee life often drives its governance towards total institutionalism (Kreichauf, 2018, p. 4), a condition in which individuals are cut off from wider society for significant periods of time and live enclosed lives, formally administered by bureaucrats, often in the name of protecting the community against perceived “intentional dangers” (Goffman, 1961, p. 4–5). Mobility between the strata of the controllers and the controlled is “grossly restricted,” if not impermeable (Goffman, 1961, p. 7). Refugee life becomes a space of uncertain paradox, “positioned between formality and informality, mobility and immobility, permanence and impermanence” (Grbac, 2013, p. 3).

Existing within such abnormal order for indefinite periods of time means that refugees are consistently physically, mentally and socially isolated, bared “from the life of the legitimate community,” and, by extension, critical material and immaterial components of well-being and self-help, stripping away the most primary conditions that constitute access to the fullness of human existence and better possibilities for effective life choices (Zylinska 2004, p. 526). In the most extreme or exclusionary cases, empowerment outcomes might be limited to an overreliance on charity (Lewis, 2007) or even consistent criminality, because the only manner to gain access to formal protections of the law is to be recognized as offenders against it (Arendt, 1958, p. 286). A pure application of Agamben’s presumptions would point to only the direst possible outcomes for refugees. Since they possessed only their animalistic body devoid of rights, possible change would end at the physical body, leaving the reclamation of power solely in the bodily realm with actions such as hunger striking, lip sewing or even suicide (Owens, 2009).

2.1.2.2 *The inclusion of responsive innovation*

The more the state conceptualizes and treats refugees as bodies in a collective with no recourse to engage in the political side of their humanity, the less they might be positioned to overcome the state systems that produce and subjugate them. It naturally follows, however, that the looser such measures of extreme exclusion, the greater chance for individualism to take hold and to drive meaningful choices and even innovate scalable solutions for change that benefit wider communities. Indeed, when refugees have been able to execute a greater degree of choice “to live where they wanted, with whom they wanted and to support themselves the way they wanted,” program evaluations have shown preservation of more individual household assets, development of more resident-driven community services, improvement in nutrition and ultimately greater resiliency through sustainable livelihoods that reduce dependency on the state and increase overall socioeconomic well-being (UNHCR, 2006, p. 29).

Lesser degrees of exclusion might be overt or accidental. On the one hand, avenues for inclusion may be intentional in the form of permissive laws that at least offer more legal possibilities for individual choice, even if other executional factors impede it. On the other hand, they may also be unintentional by way of unaccounted for institutional failures, voids or inadequacies that refugees might identify and respond to themselves, directly from within the context they live. Although refugee encampments and shelters often impose inherently restrictive features on living—such as physical and social isolation, along with dependency on administering agents—not all refugee living spaces possess these characteristics to the same degree of totality, which “depends on the type of camp administration” and the possibilities for refugees’ own self-administration (Domanski, 1997, p. 30–1).

Different characteristics of material and immaterial resource sets, combined with specific, contextual institutional conditions, have the possibility to “create opportunities for some people to innovate, adapt and engage in forms of arbitrage,” even within restrictive environments (Betts et al., 2016, p. 9). When people are faced with choices for their well-being that are subject to constraints, they trend towards behaviors that utilize and manipulate institutional conditions around them in any way possible “as to alter the pay-offs to induce cooperative [and beneficial] solutions” (North, 1995, p. 22). Human tendencies towards efficiency and curiosity give way to experimentation, creative innovation and novelty, which have formed the basis of knowledge inquiries and improved ways of doing throughout human evolution (North, 1994). Long (2001) summarizes these interactions and responses as the:

[...] capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints (e.g., physical, normative or politico-economic) that exist, social actors [...] attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them, and to a degree they monitor their own actions, observing how others react to their behavior and taking note of the various contingent circumstances (p. 16).

The possibility for these evolving feedback mechanisms presents a mechanism to drive change and avenues for more inclusion. While these changes may often originate from the top-down as government actors respond to domestic or international political pressure exerted from populations, lobbying efforts or organizations, they may similarly arise from the bottom-up, as refugees themselves identify certain types of institutional voids and inadequacies that they might capitalize on themselves to improve functioning in the previously mentioned areas (La Chaux & Haugh, 2014). These transformations may come in the form of both finding ways to increase means of individual or familial social participation, but also building connections with other similar individuals to organize and pursue change collectively and systematically (Grabska, 2006). Such bottom-up transformation can go even further when the visions and capabilities of particular individuals (who might be considered “everyday innovators”) lead to “transform[ing] constraints into opportunities for themselves and others” (Betts et al., 2016, p. 9). This type of creative problem solving, adapting products and procedures to address situational challenges, can even be linked to the formal

processes of innovation, in which these everyday innovators identify a specific problem, define a solution, try the solution and modify it for scale (Betts et al., 2012; Betts et al., 2016; Betts, Bloom, & Weaver, 2015). In ways that are perhaps less explicit or scalable, the very “multitude of ‘tactics’ articulated in the details of everyday life” can reveal the “‘ways of operating’ [that] constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by [institutions]” (Certeau, 1984, p. xiv) and, through these “small acts [...] claw back some control and recuperate some sense of their own agency, in situations that are contingent, [...] constantly changing, forever uncertain” (Eyben, 2004, p. 26).

Even Foucault’s aforementioned biopolitics of exclusion—which sees governance as moving beyond mere political structures and the management of states to the mechanisms of control in which individual bodies are directed and disciplined (Zieleniec, 2007, p. 127)—simultaneously emphasizes the multi-level nature of its implications, that individual actions at the most micro-level can illuminate room for independence, negotiations, responses and resistances that might challenge where and how specifically structures of exclusion are actually perpetuated within the context of everyday living spaces:

One needs to investigate [...] beginning at the lowest level, how mechanisms of power have been able to function [...] we need to see the manner in which, at the effective level of the family, of the immediate environment, of the cells and most basic units of society, these phenomena [...] possessed their instruments and their logic, in response to a certain number of needs. We need to identify the agents responsible for them, their real agents [...] We must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and state institutions, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the tactics and techniques of domination [...] What makes power hold good [...] is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses (Zieleniec, 2007, p. 127–8 citing Foucault, 1980, p. 100, 101, 102, 119).

Ultimately, as refugees transcend life within and outside of the normal order, crossing borders as creations of states thanks to the conflicts of states, their resources and capabilities are uniquely influenced by top-down conditions affecting their socioeconomic futures in the long-term, but also means of creative, survival-related problem solving in the short-term (Betts et al., 2015; Jacobsen, 2006). Possibilities for change are so codependent on these conditions because every part of life is legislated to distinction; because the very essence of refugeehood is stringently legal, but consequently so physical and visceral, the boundary between “between private life and political existence” does not exist (Agamben, 1998, p. 121).

2.2 Conceptualizing multidimensional agent-structure factors for change

As the previous section clarifies the position, the distinction of refugees’ circumstances stems from state-driven constructs, which can inherently tie biopolitical exclusion, and thus constraints on life possibilities, directly into the very essence of refugee existence. The answers to how specifically they are affected—and to what degrees of exclusion and applications of individual resources vary—are rich and complex. This dynamism demands analysis and understanding of the specific factors in a given situation of refugee living leading to potentially better or worse outcomes.

The study of marginalization outcomes and responses in specific groups of individuals is not new. The vast literature theorizing the nature of response towards objective and relative deprivation—as well as functional and legal exclusion from economic, cultural, political and social areas of life (Grabska, 2006, p. 290)—can serve as a starting point in terms of what might present as factors for change. Earlier income-consumption categorizations of exclusion or marginalization, for example, have presented a more utilitarian view that places possibilities for change on the binary distinction between having “enough commodities to meet basic material needs adequately” or not (Lipton, 1997, p. 127). Basic human needs approaches to conceptualizing capacity for change—which specify a more complete collection of necessary goods and services (food, health, education, water, sanitation) and human achievements (nutrition, life expectancy, mortality) to reduce elements of deprivation—are similarly rooted by addressing change through more

delineated adequacy levels across these various categories (see, for example, Streeten, 1981, 1984). At the same time, material factors or numeric thresholds alone do not seem to solve the complex manifestations of deprivation or exclusion (Shaffer, 2008). Although macroeconomic change can contribute to reductions in individual material deprivation by some measures (Adams, 2004), distributions of both asset and income inequality given idiosyncratic attributes of countries can still persist (Fosu, 2017, p. 328; see also, Birdsall & Londono, 1997; Ravallion, 2001). This macro-inequality can in turn continue to drive a myriad of other social ills at the individual level—such as increased violence, decreased measures of health and constrained socioeconomic mobility—which perpetuate cyclically in the communities in which they occur (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). This is not to say that broader material or objective benchmarks cannot be used in understanding what might comprise individual capacity towards reducing deprivation, but rather, that it is difficult to rely on them exclusively, especially without considering their application and manifestation at different levels of social context (Laderchi, Saith, & Stewart, 2010).

As such, models emphasizing capacity for change only within material or physiological components have given way to more multidimensional approaches looking to better acknowledge the various social and relational factors contributing to these ever-present unequal outcomes in various areas of living (Narayan, 2000; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Shaffer, 2008). Sen's (1983, 1987, 1993) influential conceptualization, for example, goes beyond the mere presence of thresholds in a variety of life categories to encompass the holistic presence or absence of fundamental capabilities and functionings, that is, what individuals can feasibly do or not do at different points in time, based on material, structural and interpersonal characteristics of their situations. This more inclusive view sees deprivation as "not only the lack of the necessities of material well-being, but the denial of opportunities for living a tolerable life" (UNDP, 1997, p. 15). The denial of opportunities leads to more holistic conditions of social exclusion, which considers deprivation as the sometimes static, but sometimes changing processes, states and relations that "prevent people from participating in the mainstream activities of society and accessing the standards of living enjoyed by the rest of society" (Taket et al., 2009, p. 10). The processes, states and relations include elements of both materialism—for example, impaired access to food, shelter, clothing, work and essential services—but also interpersonal positionality—for example, explicit denial or limitation of political rights, diminished organizational capacity, being intended or unintended victims of discrimination, lacking channels for participation within different groupings of society or partaking in specific familial, communal or gender-based roles (Levitas et al., 2007). From the perspective of responding to marginalization and exclusion, change is driven by complex economic, political, social and spatial conditions that can be anchored at different levels of organization, as well as within differing degrees of embeddedness (Popay et al., 2008).

Despite the differences in approaches through which deprivation and exclusion can be viewed, focusing on their commonalities reveals that factors contributing to change points can generally be grouped into elements of individualism, along with elements of structure, that is, within the organized patterns of social life (Sewell, 1992). Deprivation, marginalization and exclusion do not comprise merely a lack of material resources, but rather, a wider inability to fully participate within life's ordinary cadence, customs and activities (Laderchi et al., 2010). In other words, influential driving factors for change exist at the level of both singular agents in terms of what they have and possess, but also at the level of the sociopolitical, organizational, communal and cultural structures in which they live. Theories of social relations debate the extent to which agency factors are constrained by structural ones, and vice versa. On one end, voluntaristic viewpoints posit that individuals are in complete control of the social world with biology as the only constraint; on the other, deterministic ones stand in opposition in that individuals themselves are the mere carriers of structure with minimal or no independent will (Giddens, 1979; Hays, 1994). But more "complex, balanced and realistic" are views which see agent-structure influences as more intertwined because "[in reality,] no [one, specific] social actor can [simply] transform any social structure according to his/her free will, but no social actor is determined [solely or merely] by social structure" (Dépelteau, 2008, p. 52, 60).

How precisely these structure-agent interactions occur continues to be debated from ontological, methodological and analytical perspectives, especially in migration contexts (Bakewell, 2010). Differing theoretical viewpoints emphasize particular components of relationalism, individualism, temporality, consciousness, habituation or aspirational capacity with more or less primacy (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015). For example, relational views see structure less as a force that can be singled out, but rather as a construct of continuously interdependent social relations between agents who are “possessors of capacities that can only be practiced in joint actions, and capable of sensitive responses to others and to the situations of interaction [... Change] emerges from [...] emotional relatedness to others as social relations unfold across time and space (Burkitt, 2015, p. 1; see also, Dépelteau, 2008; King, 1999, 2010). More codeterministic views see the structure-agency relationship as somewhat more theoretically distinct. Within this subset of views, the question persists as to whether or not structures preexist agents—who comprise, but also work within structures to morphogenically alter them moving forward (Archer, 1995)—or whether they exist virtually, in duality, as both the “medium and the outcome of the social practices they recursively organize” (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). As they contain some distinction from agents, structures themselves may then take on their own qualities of function with their own influences on agents. Sewell (1992) suggests, for example, that structure can exist at different levels, which can be thought of as ways of operating that are more or less deep, that is, more or less hidden from everyday consciousness and thus more or less durable in their resistance to change. Drawing from this, Hays (1994) argues that this depth and durability contributes to shaping the continuum of individual action, which can include a spectrum of structure reproduction on one end, but radical structural transformation on the other. Emirbayer and Mische (1998), like Archer (1995), additionally stress the temporal components of actions, emphasizing the interconnectedness of historical actions with both present constraints, as well as the imagination of future possibilities.

Despite their differences in arriving at philosophical consensus, these viewpoints generally come to a broad convergence that individuals exhibit agency to act and operate within some nature of social structure or socially-relational reproductive patterns, which are both constraining and enabling (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015). At least from a functional perspective, however, placing a greater emphasis on the emergent, independent properties of structures has some analytical advantage “because it sees great utility in differentiating the two in order to examine their interplay, something which is of particular importance to practical analysts of society” (Archer, 2000, p. 465; see also, Archer, 1988; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Bakewell, 2010). As such, this study adopts Archer’s (2000) viewpoint that structures can exist as influential forces on actors’ individual everyday practices, but as past and current practices eventually comprise structures, it becomes more possible to consider in application how actors exist within, perpetuate, respond to, recreate, challenge or transform the structures over time and under certain conditions.

An applicable framework to analyze these dynamics within cases of refugee living—especially given the relationship of the refugee figure to state constructs—would thus examine both the individual and structural components of change, basing itself within a notion of agent-structure relations that accounts for the bidirectional possibilities of individuals to interact within, but also respond to, the institutions that define this interaction. Additionally, it would be able to adequately take into account the complex, multidimensional factors of deprivation, marginalization and exclusion, examining not only a presence or lack of certain individual assets and social positioning, but also the qualities of structural components, which might also fluctuate at given times.

2.2.1 Applying a demonstrated framework for analysis

The World Bank’s *World Development Report 2000/2001* presents an origin point in how to satisfy these conditions in application (Shaffer, 2008). Shifting from the focus on assets, labor access and social services provision that was central to assessment in 1990 (World Bank, 1990), the 2000 report emphasizes the “need to broaden the agenda [...to go] beyond the economic domain” (World Bank, 2001, p. 33). To do

so, the assessment stresses the need to grow the assets and labor possibilities of the marginalized by enhancing their holistic opportunities to protect themselves against monetary and social shocks and improve their sociopolitical participation in society through institutions that better acknowledge their interests (World Bank, 2001). The development of an early-stage applicational framework based on these elements is seen in the World Bank's *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook* (Narayan, 2002).

Expanding further on these initial World Bank iterations to better account for the multidimensional nature of deprivation and the bidirectional influences of agent-structure relations as previously discussed, Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006); Narayan (2005) and Petesch, Smulovitz and Walton (2005) converge on a more developed framework to understand the conditional factors for driving empowerment, or a lack thereof, in living situations of marginalized individuals. Their framework relates how the interaction of specific sub-elements of individual agency and broader structural components of opportunity drive possibilities for more empowered life outcomes, that is, when individuals possess greater abilities “to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 10). For marginalized individuals—who often lack a variety of resources and whose needs to rectify these shortages are often misaddressed through institutional systems that do not prioritize their interests—more empowered, choice-driven outcomes for living imply the need for both more resources and abilities in general, but also greater control over them within the systems that drive their use (Narayan, 2000, p. 8). When these components are misaligned, individuals may readily find themselves in complex, vulnerable positions (Moser, 1998) that cause and perpetuate multidimensional states of deprivation (Narayan, 2000).

Since its inception, as it has been used across development literature to better understand the lives of the marginalized, this framework can assess what drives more empowered outcomes within contexts of refugee living because it examines the ways that individuals might apply their own resources within the unique institutional context they face to execute the choices they want, either individually or collectively. As previously discussed, the distinction of refugees' circumstances is rooted within the state-driven construct of “the refugee,” which can inherently tie biopolitical exclusion, and thus a reduction of possibilities in life experiences, directly into the very essence of refugee existence. For this reason, the specific function, characteristics and dynamics of governmental institutional structures in particular are critical to evaluate, along with the nature of individual resource bases, which are not only often restricted by these structures, but also curtailed during the very process of flight from persecution.

This approach has been foundational in examining the relationships between agency, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes for many marginalized groups across the world. Its flexibility is supported by its widely demonstrated use, which has been adopted in various forms throughout hundreds of World Bank projects since the introduction of the initial framework concept in 2001 (Alsop & Norton, 2004). Further, as the framework has been further applied and studied, a variety of indicators have been proposed and debated across literature to better operationalize what is meant by agency, opportunity structure and empowerment across various levels and domains (see, for example, the extensive reviews of Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; World Bank, 2007). This wide variety of indicators for use reveals that the framework is in fact compatible with multiple conceptual interpretations and manifestations and can be customized to analyze a variety of input factors based on situational factors at hand. Essentially, the framework's strength is its emphasis on the connective power between the broader component concepts, and thus it can accommodate applicational differences in definitions.

At the same time, it is limited by the possible difficulties in associating the elements of the approach with specific development outcomes, which are follow-on results that stem from the degrees of empowerment identified. In other words, it is clearer to identify the more direct impacts of empowerment within contexts of individuals' lives, but more difficult to tease out empowerment itself from the variety of factors that influence and improve society-level development outcomes. But the fact that the framework may have difficulty linking empowerment to specific development outcomes is problematic only if the focus

of its use is to study these links specifically. How to connect the use of the framework to specific development outcomes is a separate process that is both ongoing and needs its own additional methodological research (Alsop, Heinsohn, & Somma, 2004). Further, the use of the framework is not precluded on studying only the manifestation society-level benefits. Empowerment—greater execution and application of choice within living circumstances—can have value for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons, as “having more power over one’s life is valued for its own sake in almost all societies” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 40; see also, Samman & Santos, 2009; Sen, 1985). In a similar way, the aim of this specific study is not to identify causal linkages between individual-level degrees of empowerment and society-wide indicators of economic performance or integration. Rather, it is to focus on the lived experiences of participating refugees and related actors in their local context—often those individuals perpetuating or executing structures in a governance sense—to illuminate day-to-day successes and challenges of these interactions that might drive impaired execution of individual choices to reach desired ends for a better life.

In this way, the primary relevance of the framework is the identification of such local contention points, which may contribute to considering specific areas for policy improvements or interventions based on these points. The benefits of identifying them relate to better understanding how the lives of marginalized groups—particularly refugees—might be improved with specific intervention to local breakdown points within specific arenas or domains. When targeted improvements can be successfully implemented, marginalized individuals may have greater control over their lives and more capacity to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them; a subsequent result is a positive “influence on factors such as incomes, health status, security, education and self-esteem” at the individual level (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 53). With respect to refugees’ lived experiences specifically, the presence of specific governmental structural qualities coupled with the situational application of refugees’ own capabilities, resources and qualities can contribute to cultural expansion and economic diversity within host communities (Grabska, 2005, 2006). Fostering participation, independence, innovation and inclusion in aid approaches has helped refugee gain greater levels of self-sufficiency that may position them as potential drivers of growth in local, national and even international contexts (Betts et al., 2012; Bloom & Betts, 2013).

Although more difficult to link causally, Narayan (2002) notes that these types of targeted improvements in the lives of marginalized groups have the potential to contribute to elements of “improved governance” in a broader sense, in that resident individuals are able to become “[more] engaged, exercise their voice and demand accountability,” such that this increased societal participation across more groups “can also build consensus in support of difficult reforms” (p. xvii). As these types of reforms gain traction and are successful, government itself can become more accountable, rights can become more inclusive and society may become more just overall (Alsop & Norton, 2004). These more inclusive structures would then, in turn, continue to perpetuate less exclusion and more individual capability, driving positive micro- and macro-level change in the long term (Narayan, 2005b, p. 7). Fundamentally, empowerment as the freedom of choice has deep implications for the positive measure of various societal functions—well-being, social welfare and living standards (Sen, 1988, p. 270)—namely because “if all alternatives except the chosen one were to become unavailable, [...] freedom would be diminished [...] and there would be a corresponding reduction of the advantage” that choice in and of itself affords (Sen, 1988, p. 290; see also Williams, 1987, p. 97). Predictably, the lack of choice, rights and avenues for participation in socioeconomic life have afflicted many refugee communities with material and immaterial resource inadequacies (Darling, 2011; Werker, 2007), leading to ongoing cycles of poverty and protracted aid dependency that are effectively “condemning millions of people to wasting their lives” in living conditions that possess the “rare folly of being both inhumane and expensive” to maintain (Betts & Collier, 2017).

With respect to the application of the framework to holistically examine these possible contention points, the underlying components must be further clarified to avoid the criticism that their complexity undermines their use. After all, agency, opportunity structure and empowerment lack standardized

definitions across literature more generally, but each is frequently contested and theorized individually in its own right more specifically. Despite this, the framework is nonetheless broad enough to apply within a variety of contextual applications, provided that the individual definitions used in the application are clear. Given this challenge, what follows in is an expansion of how specifically this study uses the framework to conceptualize underlying components of agency, opportunity structure and empowerment as they can be applied to assessing the dynamics of refugee living in Cologne. The discussion begins by clarifying what is meant by empowerment, that is, the nature of possible outcomes of applying different choices in action for change. It then details specifically how the components of agency and opportunity structure, along with their related qualities, contribute specifically to advancing empowerment as an outcome. Figure 1 visualizes these relationships in their entirety, including the qualities and subcomponents of each element to be discussed in the remainder of the chapter.

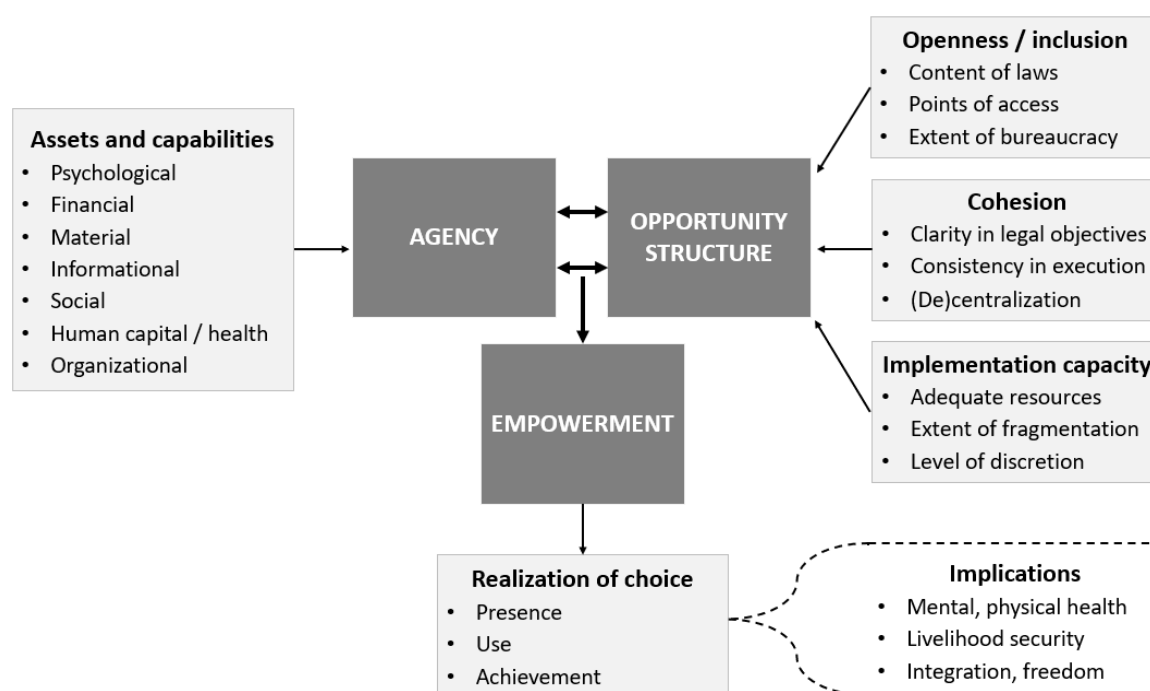


Figure 1. Conceptual approach uniting the study's analytical components. Author illustration consolidated from components in Narayan (2005b), Petesch et al. (2005) and Alsop et al. (2006).

2.2.1.1 Empowerment as the presence, use and achievement of choice

The concept of empowerment has no standardized empirical definition. It is often conflated or interchanged with terms such as self-sufficiency, autonomy, self-determination, participation capacity, liberation, control and freedom (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002; Narayan, 2002). The disciplinary perspective can change the thematic focus point (Jupp, Ali, & Barahona, 2009, p. 29), and the cultural context varies the words used when asking individuals themselves what it means to be empowered (Narayan, 2002, p. 14). Nonetheless, the various conceptualizations share common qualities (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007, p. 7–8).¹¹ These commonalities reveal that empowerment is not static; it is process-based and iterative. It involves individual choices being moved closer to or realizing their desired ends, along with some type of transformation, be it personal or institutional. It includes the presence and use of material and immaterial tools to reach those desired ends. It is social and relational (Narayan, 2005b, p. 6), because “inequalities [...] are produced by the relations between different groups, through unequal social interactions and associated processes of socialization” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 40).

¹¹ Ibrahim and Alkire (2007, p. 7–8, Box 1) list over 30 definitions of empowerment taken from across literature. The commonalities listed are derived from the definitions present there.

These commonalities are related to the concerns of marginalized individuals, whose own descriptions of life include shared themes such as lacking voice and independence, but also feeling powerless to alter their circumstances (Narayan, 2000; World Bank, 2001). As such, from the perspective of marginalized individuals, the power to overcome the condition of being marginalized in, excluded from living in or taking action within certain areas of living embodies empowerment. Power itself can be thought of simply as “the energy that causes change” (Eyben, 2004, p. 17): it is the action “to make things happen” (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002, p. 5). To *empower* is thus to put power—energy—into something. For the marginalized, empowerment is to put more power—energy, force or effect—into their chosen actions such that they may affect real change in their circumstances, particularly in response to the complex “interlocking multidimensionality” of the previously discussed factors contributing to their poverty and marginalization in the first place (Narayan, 2000, p. 4).

Given this premise, the framework grounds the definition of empowerment around the effectiveness and achievement of choice. It is increasing “people’s freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives” (Narayan, 2005b, p. 4); effectively advancing “particular interests through their own choice and action” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 40); and enhancing “capacity to make effective choices, that is, [...] to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 10). As both Alsop et al. (2006) and Narayan (2005b) emphasize, the application of choice and nature of outcomes can be examined from the perspective of individuals acting within relation to their own visions, as well as within their potential membership roles in collectively-organized groups pursuing more macro-level goals. Rocha (1997) also emphasizes that examining either focus does not “characterize[e] one as less beneficial and one as more beneficial;” rather, it is simply the locus of organization and outcomes that is emphasized (p. 34).¹²

If empowerment exists when choices are made more effective to reach a desired end, specific factors must drive this effectiveness or lack thereof. Understanding empowerment is based on understanding these “differences [...] that deny actors the capacity to make transforming choices” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 15). Recalling those of exclusion and marginalization, the drivers of empowerment similarly exist at the individual (agent) or institutional (structure) level, as empowerment is comprised of the general “dynamic process through which the interaction of agency and opportunity structure has the potential to improve the capacity of individuals or groups to make effective choices” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 15). This accounts for fundamental agent-structure interplays, but their analytical separation into component parts facilitates better understanding of the component contributors (Archer, 2000). This interactive nature recalls Sen’s notion that expanding human capabilities and freedoms “involves both the processes that allow freedom of actions and decisions and the actual opportunities that people have, given their personal and social circumstances” (Sen, 1999, p. 17). Outcomes of “unfreedom,” or disempowerment, can arise when either structural (legalities or rights) or asset-related (poor health, lack of food) components are compromised and lead to inadequate chances “for achieving what [people] minimally would like to achieve” (Sen, 1999, p. 17).

Empowerment can be treated as outcome of these interactions because it is the actual realization of choices to meet desired ends, occurring when individuals have “a reasonable prospect of having an influence on [...] processes and outcomes (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 41). Reaching desired results implies that individuals have been able to translate their assets and capabilities as agents (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 16) within a structure that promotes productive interaction within social, state and market systems and more equalized

¹² Rocha (1997) discusses a five-category typology of empowerment. The typologies are not hierarchical, but rather, focus on how elements of structure and agency interact across levels of individual psychology, immediate community and national (or international) governance. Each level emphasizes different degrees of individualism or collectivism, noting that empowerment of a group as a social movement can be evaluated as its own type of empowerment. Smulovitz’ (2003) eight-degree typology of empowerment can similarly apply to either individual or collective actors (p. 1) in organizational contexts with different content or types (p. 2). The locus of evaluation, conceptualized in the study as domain, is explained further in Section 2.2.1.4.

power to take action (Narayan, 2005b, p. 6). As such, this study adopts the viewpoint that agency is distinct from empowerment because it comprises the tools or rote capacity with which to make choices, and opportunity structure distinct because it comprises the conditions under which those tools can be applied.

The contribution of these separate components into empowerment outcomes can be further seen in understanding effective choice. To achieve a choice, it must carry an individual through the desired end and fulfill an intended purpose. The basic capacity to act as an agent is not the same as the achievement of desired results (Sen, 1985); effective choice is thus more than just capacity. An individual may possess the rote ability or resources to do something, but situational conditions or opportunity costs may prevent that ability from being extended to fruition (Williams, 1987, p. 100). Breaking down empowerment's components into agency and opportunity structure drives a fuller assessment of the level in which effective choice breaks down or succeeds (Alsop et al., 2006; Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005; Samman & Santos, 2009; Jupp et al., 2009, p. 36). These levels at which it may break down are at the presence of choice, the use of choice and the overall achievement of choice. These levels have roots within elements of political opportunity structure and social movement theory, which emphasize that successful (collective) change involves not only the rote presence of what actions might be structurally permissible, but whether choice to take action is viewed as relevant or applicable to reach a specific end in a specific context (Koopmans, 1999).

As such, the first assessment is whether an opportunity to make a choice exists at all. Do structures permit or forbid it? Are the necessary resources or abilities available at hand to access or utilize? If the choice is available, the second assessment is whether it is undertaken. Do structures at different levels conflict in their support or hinderance? Are different resources valued over those that might arise from making the choice? If the choice is taken, the final assessment is whether the choice brings about sought-after or valued ends. Is the outcome what the individual wants, in accordance with the associated value system? This final aspect of choice is essential to empowerment because "a change of the opportunity set [...] cannot involve any real change of freedom unless what is chosen by the person also changes as a result" (Sen, 1988, p. 272).¹³

Analyzing empowerment and choice through its presence, use and achievement also helps underscore the importance of allowing for variance in outcomes and assessing them with regards to what individuals themselves desire, as they value different things in different circumstances. Physical or material security, happiness (or other emotional conditions), rights, religious satisfaction or moral fulfillment, for example, are different types of outcomes that can be distinguished from one another and may be valued more in some circumstances as opposed to others (Sen, 1985). Recalling the multidimensional nature of deprivation, becoming better off involves not just materialism, but "rights for the life, survival, integrity, and development of the person" (Moser, 2004, p. 33). In addition to achieving individual preferences and choices, well-being includes an individual's self-identified mental state, the fulfillment of both basic and abstract needs and even the state of the world as a whole (Dodds, 1997). To ignore an avenue for analytical insight into varied, valued outcomes is to ignore the real diversity in needs among individuals (Sen, 1999, p. 62), promote a type of "commodity fetishism" too narrowly focused on means rather than ends (Sen, 1989, p. 47) and denigrate the complex nuances driving a "person's inability to choose to move toward a higher standard of living" (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 72).

¹³ Alsop et al. (2006) describes how this assessment might work in practice using an example of a rural mother deciding whether to send her daughter to school. A school (an asset needed to act) may not exist at all, but if it does, the woman may choose to utilize it or not. She might not be able to afford school supplies (lacks assets needed to act) or may be forbidden by her husband to send their daughter to school (family constraints conflict with policies in the governmental opportunity structure). If she sends her daughter to school, the choice may be ineffective if she ultimately feels her daughter would be more useful at home (choice does not meet a desired result). The example underscores that understanding the dynamics of empowerment "involve[s] documenting the interplay between her assets and her opportunity structure" within the context of assessing values and choices (p. 17–8).

Ultimately, the conceptualization of empowerment as effective choice, driven by situational components of agency and opportunity structure, allows for analyzing these nuances, acknowledging various levels and degrees of empowerment outcomes to better understand the conditions under which marginalized individuals can improve their circumstances. Conditions of agency and opportunity structure must also be broken down further to reach these analytical ends.

2.2.1.2 Agency as assets and capabilities

Agency, as a driving component of empowerment, is an intrinsic quality of human life that fuels the energy “to form and pursue a conception of the good” (Sen, 1985, p. 190). In the context of the empowerment framework, agency means that individuals have the tools at hand to take purposeful action to further their own interests (Narayan, 2005b, p. 6, 10), as well as “bring about their goals” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11). Agency is a driver of empowered choice because “the capacity to act as an agent implies that the actor is able to envision alternative paths of action, decide among them and take action to advance the chosen path as an individual or collectively with others” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 42).

As such, agency is being able to do something with something. Being *able to do something* defines the abilities, functions and inherent characteristics necessary for being human (capabilities) (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2005, p. 119); *with something* defines the resources at hand (assets) individuals use to deploy their abilities (Narayan, 2005b, p. 10). As such, agency is operationalized through the repository of material and immaterial resources individuals can apply in advancing their goals. This operational definition of agency as an individual’s assets and capabilities is relevant because they are the tools and functions “that equip actors to use economic, social and political opportunities to be productive” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11, citing Moser, 1998). Broadly, “possessing more of such capital” helps limit marginalized individuals’ “dependence on others and increases their capacity to make choices” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 42).

Although what specifically constitutes or categorizes an asset or capability is often debated,¹⁴ assets and capabilities can nonetheless be treated holistically as different types of material and immaterial resources and tools, or types of capital, that individuals may apply or use within their circumstances. Despite differences in labeling asset and capability types across literature,¹⁵ there is nonetheless consensus that a full spectrum of asset types, resources and human capacities represent the fundamental components of agency, and “no single category of assets on its own is sufficient to yield all the many and varied” goals that individuals seek (DFID, 1999, p. 5). Ultimately the labeling or “division into [a specific number of] types is not definitive,” nor the critical point for analysis (Messer & Townsley, 2003, p. 8). Rather, the acknowledgment is important that many kinds of activities people do, the skills they possess and the items that they use them with play a role in individuals’ agency and ultimately well-being. Indeed, there is likely no one ultimate list that can accurately encompass all possible assets and capabilities in every possible context (see, for example, Sen, 2005, p. 158; Crocker, 2008), but Alsop et al.’s (2006) thematic division into material, human, social, financial, psychological, informational and organizational categories (Table 1) encompasses and envelops a diverse range of specific asset and capability types noted across literature.

¹⁴ Literature based on variants of a sustainable livelihoods framework, for example, tends to treat all material and immaterial resources together as types of livelihood capital (for example, Chambers and Conway, 1991 or Scoones, 1998). Literature drawing from the capabilities approach focuses more on the metaphysical differences between human functioning versus capability—that is, what is simply a state of being as opposed to a real possibility to act or put together basic functioning in certain ways (for example, Nussbaum, 2000 or Sen, 1999). The empowerment framework treats capabilities as immaterial, human or behavioral tools, distinct from material ones, but capabilities are simultaneously treated as a part of the broader “range of [all] assets” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11).

¹⁵ Narayan (2005b), for example, separates organizational from social assets because although social assets are prerequisites for organizational capacity, separate and distinct “bridging” factors are necessary to generate [collective or social movements that can bring one type of structural change, making two categories sensible] (p. 11). Alsop et al. (2006) follows with this distinction, but treats mental state and outlooks on life as psychological assets, whereas Petesch et al. (2005) labels the same concept as “capacity to aspire” (p. 42).

ASSET / CAPABILITY	CONCEPTUALIZATION	AS IN
Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical items (ex., personal possessions) • Infrastructure (ex., transit, public facilities) • [Natural resources]¹⁶ 	Messer & Townsley, 2003, p. 9 DFID, 1999, p. 11, 13
Human capital / health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional skills / experiences • Education level • Language knowledge/ literacy • Legal status • Ethnicity / origin country • Physical health 	Messer & Townsley, 2003, p. 9 DFID, 1999, p. 7
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles / relationships in the family unit • Networks • Interaction with others in community • Sociocultural practices, values, tools 	Narayan, 2005b, p. 11 Messer & Townsley, 2003, p. 9 DFID, 1999, p. 9
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income • Livelihood activities • Purchasing abilities / channels 	Messer & Townsley, 2003, p. 9 DFID, 1999, p. 15
Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental, emotional state / health • Psychological coping / aspiration • Personal identity 	Narayan, 2005b, p. 10 Petesch et al., 2005, p. 42–3
Informational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of relevant information • Communication channels (ex., internet) 	Narayan, 2002, p. xix Narayan, 2005b, p. 8 DFID, 1999, p. 13
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-organization • Participation in organized groups 	Narayan, 2005b, p. 11 Petesch et al., 2005, p. 43–44 DFID, 1999, p. 9

Table 1. Conceptualization of asset-capability capital categories. Author overview based on Alsop et al.'s (2006) thematic labeling and definitions consolidated across literature.

Operationalizing agency as a variety of asset and capability types helps determine what tools individuals need for action in what circumstances. Agency is more than possessing physical goods because making choices is more complex than mere consumption (Moser, 1998). As marginalization is multidimensional, therefore too are the types of assets and capabilities that individuals require to better “influence, negotiate, control and hold accountable other actors in order to increase their own well-being” and reduce conditions of their marginalization (Narayan, 2005b, p. 10). Assets and capabilities are also varied at any given time. What is possessed and viewed as relevant changes based on evolving needs and evaluations of well-being that vary with circumstance (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11; Sen, 1989, p. 47). Some play different roles, for example, in emergency contexts (Moser, 1998; Petesch et al., 2005, p. 42) because underlying, often biological, needs of subsistence and survival can dominate immediate action and prevent focus on the pursuit of more abstract or metaphysical needs and resources (see, for example, Dodds, 1997 for a discussion of Maslow, 1970; Max-Neef, 1991 and Boylan, 2004). Similarly, the capacity to aspire, form

¹⁶ For studies working with marginalized groups who rely on subsistence farming or live within conditions of failing infrastructure, such as slums or rural encampments, natural resources are far more critical material assets that help assess individuals’ agency. Given that this study focuses on the lives of refugees within a large, industrialized German city, the presence of natural resources as such is not applicable and thus not emphasized as a dimension of analysis.

goals and internalize a strong identity are psychological capabilities critical to conceiving possibilities for life improvements and feeling motivated to attempt action toward that end at all (Narayan, 2005a; see also, Nussbaum, 2000). These multidimensional compositions of asset sets may lead to circumstantial sequencing or substitutions, in which possessing some in a specific order may drive better outcomes over time or may compensate for a lack of others, respectively (DFID, 1999). These spatially- and temporally-specific uses of different individual human qualities—that include not only specific capacities or skills, but also ways of identity formation and claims to group belonging based on demographic or social characteristics—are embodied by an individual’s translocational positionality (Anthias, 2001, 2008), increasingly apparent as a coping or resiliency mechanism in migration contexts (Werbner, 1999; Katartzi, 2020). Such positionality means that “at different times and in different contexts, people engage and organize differently [...as] their aims, as well as related strategies, will differ” (Anthias, 2009, p. 7). Refugees are particularly disposed to the use or value of different resources and capabilities at different times, as the translocationality of their operational settings pans continuously intersecting areas of native and host country conditions, open and shadow markets and private, public and para-public governance (Betts et al., 2016).

Ultimately, across different areas of living, the assets used and sought to reach desired ends are not only the ones materially necessary to survive, but also discretionary to produce possibilities for enhanced means of living and notions of holistic well-being.

2.2.1.3 Opportunity structure as governmental institutions and their qualities of operation

The opportunity structure in which individuals live affects the likelihood that their agency—the use of their assets and capabilities—will achieve favorable outcomes (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 16; Petesch et al., 2005, p. 41). In the context of the empowerment framework, the opportunity structure is broadly operationalized as the repository of sociopolitical “institutions that govern people’s behavior and that influence the success or failure of the choices that they make” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 13). Merely having resources does not necessarily allow individuals to fulfill the functions they seek (Nussbaum, 2000); rather, institutions define the terms of use of such resources, shaping choice by preventing or enabling effective action with assets and capabilities at hand (Narayan, 2005b, p. 6).

The broadest definition of institutions refers to “the rules of the game” in a social arena (North, 1990, p. 3). More specifically, institutions are the enumerated and tacit bounds of behavior that form “systems of established and embedded social rules” that structure interactions (Hodgson, 2006, p. 18; see also, Knight, 1992, p. 2–3). North (1990) provides a categorization of institutions as either formal (“the rules that human beings devise” to include laws, policies and judicial decisions) or informal (constraints, conventions, codes of behavior, culture or traditions) (p. 4, 6), but extensive debate questions the extent to which these categorizations are wholly accurate¹⁷ (Alesina & Giuliano, 2013; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Hodgson, 2006). As such, the study prefers the categorization of Helmke and Levitsky (2004), seeing aspects of institutions that are both “created, communicated, and enforced through channels widely accepted as official,” as well as done so “outside of officially sanctioned channels” (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727).

This categorization is useful because it does not conflate so-called formality with governmentality (see, for example, Hodgson, 2001, p. 298–307); the state and its member-actors are just one type of organizational unit (Knight, 1992, p. 3). More importantly, explicit or even legal rules are not the only components of governmental institutional function or existence (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 13), which are also

¹⁷ In general, culture is often difficult to disentangle from structure, both theoretically and empirically. For example, both Hodgson (2006) and Helmke and Levitsky (2004) stress that habitual expectations may be distinct from culture. Although there may be situational overlap, expectations of action in specific circumstances may or may not be rooted in cultural traditions or shared values. Hodgson (2001, p. 296–8) and Koopmans (1999) expand more on these theoretical distinctions. Alesina and Giuliano (2013) review these points empirically in an extensive literature review. This study does not attempt to reconcile these difficulties, but rather treats individual culture as a social capital element of agency that individuals can value and apply and bureaucrats’ behavior as a governance implementation quality.

supported and perpetuated by customs and individual dispositions (Hodgson, 2006, p. 18; see also, Lipsky, 1980; Leftwich & Sen, 2010; Schlicht, 1998). Ultimately, institutional systems exist in governmental or nongovernmental contexts, and “formal and informal dimensions” (Narayan, 2000, p. 10)—that is, explicit rules, procedures and precedents on the one hand, and unwritten rules and expected roles of individuals on the other—can be components of both (Knight, 1992, p. 3; Narayan, 2005b, p. 8–9).

At the same time, given its aim to apply it within a study of refugee living, to limit the scope of otherwise astronomical analyses and to avoid conceptual quagmires of relying solely on formal versus informal categorizations, the study focuses the conceptualization of opportunity structures on the governmental and legal institutions which advance the political conditions and laws inherently bounding refugees’ terms of participation in society (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 14), especially as they relate to marginalizing refugees’ access to political processes, economic markets and avenues of social inclusion, as discussed in the beginning of the chapter. Especially in the context of refugee living, this particular focus is justified, as it is consistent with the primacy of “provisioning institutions” that are “directly related to the production, distribution, acquisition, maintenance and protection of the means of everyday life” and thus often inherently tied to the governmental and legal structures that regulate, recognize and classify them (Hodgson, 2001, p. 298). Although governmental institutions and legal rules are certainly not the exclusive drivers of agency application (Hodgson, 2006, p. 12), their contributions are significant because they can indicate society’s priorities such that they must be controlled by the state’s claim over the “use of force” (Hodgson, 2001, p. 301). In other words, “as the institutionalized center for the legitimate monopoly on the means of violence, the state is the ultimate arbiter for the allocation of socially valued goods” (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995, p. 2). Normative behavior about what is valued often forms the basis of these regulations and laws, becoming formally codified within legal-political structures over time (Hodgson, 2006, p. 6). As such, pursuing avenues for empowerment improvement is frequently state-oriented or involves interactions with governmental institutions to some degree (Amenta & Young, 1999, p. 153; Rootes, 1999).¹⁸ When evaluating the influence of these institutions on action, they matter because “changes in the rules change the way the game is played” (Pejovich, 1999, p. 165). Improved institutional arrangements can facilitate “increases in knowledge, technological innovations and other activities [that] create new opportunities for [personal] gains” (Pejovich, 1999, p. 165). This point is particularly applicable to the functioning of governmental institutions, which “are central to the adjudication of conflicting claims” between members and strata of society (Jenkins, 1995, p. 8).

Recalling the aforementioned balance between considering enumerated and tacit, official and unofficial elements of institutional function (Knight, 1992, p. 3; Narayan, 2005b, p. 8–9), these qualities can generally be assessed both with regards to the contents of laws, policies and enumerated governing documents themselves, but also in the ways that governance actors perpetuate them with their own behaviors within the expectations and manifestations of their roles (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 13). Incorporating these qualities of function that are both more explicit and more implicit is necessary for two particular reasons. First, it allows for the consideration of how non-legal or behavioral (or sometimes cultural) elements—manifested in examples like caste (Hodgson, 2006, p. 12), historical preferences towards certain forms of social organization (Alesina & Giuliano, 2013, p. 8), collective identities (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Koopmans, 1999) or shared mythos (Koopmans, 1999, p. 97)—can work their way into governance execution. Second, it supports how the study considers agent-structure relations, recalling both Archer (1995) and Foucault (1977), who emphasize that individuals act within structures, but also reproduce them

¹⁸ Regardless of how empowerment is conceptualized, the influence of governmental institutions cannot be completely removed. Even Samman and Santos (2009), who define empowerment as an increase in agency as opposed to an outcome of agency- and institution-based interactions, acknowledge that empowerment implicitly encompasses the influence of governmental institutions because politically opportunistic processes, along with material and immaterial possessions, compel or inhibit decision making (Sen, 1999, p. 17).

themselves. Especially as governance actors in power may have little incentive to change their own behavior for the common good (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 84), their customary or habitual practices of marginalization, which may or may not be rooted in cultural elements (see footnote 14), perpetuate and form a pattern to become the formally institutionalized, legal structures of exclusion (Eyben, 2004, p. 23).¹⁹ In particular, the behaviors of governance actors at the (usually local) implementation-level of policy are particularly predisposed to illustrate this mechanism (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). Mediating policy through their immediate interactions executing directives with individuals of the populace, these local governance actors represent, enact and perpetuate structure, often as so-called street-level bureaucrats using discretion and judgment in how policy is manifested at an individual level (Lipsky, 1980). Such discretion and judgment is often fueled by, but also used to, reinforce a community's sense of moral order or "shared meanings of a customary way of life" (Yngvesson, 1988, p. 444) and may ultimately translate into governance actors themselves evaluating an individual's worthiness on a case-by-case basis to be a beneficiary of a more inclusive application of policy (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

Following this, the framework derives the evaluative components of opportunity structure originally from political opportunity and social movement theory, which tie possibilities for change driven by marginalized groups to the extent that "mainstream institutional politics and policy" (that is, governmental institutions and how they function) enhance or inhibit their prospects for participation, mobilization and influence (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, p. 1458). In the context of driving greater empowerment, similar qualities of the governmental institutional structure either encourage or discourage the application of agency, for either individuals or groups too apply to specific ends (Smulovitz, 2003; Tarrow, 1996, p. 54). Within the framework, these qualities are consolidated around the extent of inclusivity or openness, cohesion and implementation capacity within government institutional structures (McAdam, 1996; Petesch et al., 2005).²⁰

Openness, or inclusion, refers to the extent that structures enable marginalized individuals to "exert influence in the full array of society's organizations" (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 46), to include who can engage in what, under what conditions and with what resources (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 46). This can be specifically evaluated with respect to both the nature of laws and the functioning of governance actors. In the dimension of legal directives, laws can either restrict or enable specific activities (Smulovitz, 2003). In the case of marginalized individuals, activities or types of participation may be constrained via delineators of income, employment status, race, gender, caste, religion or geography. Recalling that many of these components can be viewed as pieces of an individual's asset repository, agency and legal openness are thus often clearly connected as such, eliminating applications of choice if individuals possess these components of agency. In the dimension of execution, openness also includes the functioning of procedural components, such as the extent of bureaucratic processes, that are required to apply agency in various channels of both everyday life and governance (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 47). These procedural components can also contribute to openness in that they are related to the ability to access governance structures more generally (Kitschelt, 1986; Koopmans, 1999). Structures that are decentralized (across multiple levels) and less concentrated (across various branches of government), for example, can offer more entry points for individual constituent

¹⁹ North (1990) explains that rules are often created and perpetuated by those with sufficient power and bargaining strength, often "in the interests of private well-being rather than social well-being" (p. 48).

²⁰ Petesch et al.'s (2005) consolidation of qualities is not fundamentally problematic because "many combinations of openness and implementation capacity may occur" within different contexts (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 64; see also, Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). Further, as Meyer and Minkoff (2004) note in their review of qualities of political opportunity structure defined across literature, different nomenclature often denotes the same fundamental concepts (p. 1460). Petesch et al. (2005) draws on these fundamental concepts, which have the potential and flexibility to "explain the strategies and impacts of [action] concerned with qualitative life-chances and the physical structuring of the social environment" (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 85), despite differences in labeling or categorization. Additionally, the dimensions of the framework follow the same consolidation of McAdam (1996), whose categorization of operational qualities of political opportunity structure are based on the consolidated nomenclature of key theorists.

engagement, as well as legal balances to adjudicate behavioral bounds (Della Porta, 2013; Kriesi, 1995). Openness in both explicit laws and their execution can combine when considering the presence of functional information flows about participatory terms (Narayan, 2005b, p. 8), as well as the extent of accountability feedback mechanisms (Narayan, 2000). This means not only that structures possess reliable means with which governance endeavors can be enforced justly and reviewed to be functioning properly (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 47), but also that means exist to create new channels of recognition, participation and change (Gamson, 1975; Kitschelt, 1986, p. 63; Kriesi, 1995, p. 85), based on the acknowledgment and use of information regarding the challenges of marginalized groups (Kriesi, 1995, p. 63–4; Narayan, 2002, p. 20).

The second characteristic is cohesion. It can refer to the qualities of law being clearly defined in their objectives, consistently implemented and uniformly adopted. It also refers to the degree that the power of governing bodies is unified (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 47). Cohesion manifests across various dimensions of governmental institutional structures, such as the composition of political parties, the presence of special interest groups or the functional ties between branches of government (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 47-8; see also Kitschelt, 1986). With respect to operation, a balance of both unity and fragmentation generally predisposes governmental structures to accommodate the application of agency and enhance potential empowerment. On the one hand, some degree of institutional permeability and elite fragmentation is necessary, such that advocates and inroads for change can be successfully utilized (either individually or collectively) when agency is compromised (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 50). On the other hand, too much fragmentation leads to instability or policy stalwarts, along with a general inability “to produce clear and uncontested winners or sufficient consensus to advance a policy agenda” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 47–8). A well-composed level of cohesion is required such that government institutions and policies function consistently, predictably and peaceably without trending towards repression where governing actors in power maintain all voice and little external participation, voice or intervention is possible.

In a similar way, the cohesion of governance is also related to the third influential characteristic, implementation capacity, that is, “the effectiveness with which government authorities carry out policies” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 48; see also, Kitschelt, 1986, p. 63).²¹ In one aspect, implementation can “encompass the state’s basic bureaucratic capabilities such as technical and managerial skills, the adequacy of administrative and financial resources for delivering services and the actual reach of state agencies” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 48); in other words, the “infrastructural capacity of the state, essentially its ability to mobilize labor and financial resources” influences the likelihood that policies function as intended to encourage the application of agency (Jenkins, 1995, p. 11). Implementation is also related to organizational cohesion in that a wider diffusion of procedural operations creates more intermediary points that must function in conjunction with one another to meet the same end. When execution mechanisms are highly decentralized with “a complicated division of jurisdiction between a multitude of semi-independent government agencies and a federal stratification of state authority,” policy implementation, along with agency application, can become far more complex (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 63). Despite providing more potential entry points for constituent engagement, less cohesive structures can also produce organizational fragmentation, a lack of internal coordination and lack of professionalization, creating more potential channels for executional breakdown (Kriesi, 1995; Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). These points of executional breakdown can be both problematic and opportunistic, in that they contribute to the formation of institutional voids, in which the execution of policy does not necessarily align with their formal regulatory dimensions (La Chau & Haugh, 2014). Such voids can drive the discretion of street-level bureaucrats in adjudicating governing processes and regulatory practice (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010) and, in turn, the inadequacy of these practices to clearly arbitrate key terms of just and inclusive socioeconomic participation (Khanna, Palepu, & Bullock, 2010; Kitschelt, 1986, p. 64). On the other hand, they can also lead individuals to

²¹ According to Kitschelt (1986), cohesion and capacity are the output structures that together affect implementation.

take advantage of governance blind spots that cannot or do not oversee certain activities (Bulley, 2014; La Chaux & Haugh, 2014, 2020) or create systematic cracks in the systems of control through organized protest or more explicit defiance behavior (Della Porta, 2013; Dadusc & Mudu, 2020; Kibreab, 2004).

Although there is no single combination of qualities that will result in universally inclusive or enabling structures (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Kitschelt, 1986, p. 64, 85; Koopmans, 1999), governmental institutions are more predisposed to supporting empowered change when they offer marginalized individuals more “authority and control over decisions and resources, developed to the lowest appropriate level” (Narayan, 2005b, p. 8). When structures systematically deny this to individuals, marginalization and exclusion can become deeply imbedded within the essence of governmental institutions (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 15). In this case, marginalization becomes so difficult to overcome because such essential characteristics have “the power to mold the capacities and behavior of agents in fundamental ways: they have a capacity to change aspirations instead of merely enabling or constraining them” (Hodgson, 2006, p. 7). They may even become the naturalized actions of tradition that become habitual, if not instinctual, as opposed to deliberate, reflective or strategic (Bourdieu, 1977). As such, the marginalized often feel hopeless to move beyond their conditions at worst (Narayan, 2000), or their expectations for what they might be able to expect for their well-being are drastically curtailed at best (Sen, 1988, p. 45). In this way, a more empowering opportunity structure for action becomes critical, such that better means for effective interactions with governmental structures are opened for enhanced participation in society (Narayan, 2005b, p. 10, 12). This, in turn, drives trust in structures, optimism about the future and deeper, more holistic belief that empowerment is possible as a “foundational nor[m] of society” (Sengupta, 2008, p. 37).

2.2.1.4 Domains and levels of organization

Empowerment is complex and multifaceted, touching many aspects of the lives of marginalized individuals. As such, empowerment and its component parts can be manifested differently across the spectrum of these experiences (Samman & Santos, 2009). Following Sewell’s (1992) conceptualization, asset and capability repositories may be enabled or constrained in different areas or manners of living, or domains. They may also be applicable at different levels of social organization or participation (Holland & Brook, 2004; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007), individually or collectively (Smulovitz, 2003). The opportunity structure may be similarly affected across domains and levels; what may be permissible at one level of governance or within one domain may be thwarted at another. Of course, domains and levels of living do not have completely rigid bounds. Components of one domain often seep into another. But functionally bounding these domains and levels helps to organize them to more specifically understand the drivers of action or inaction in different areas of living that contribute to empowerment’s complexity.

Individuals can behave as political, economic and social actors, meaning that they can act within these different respective domains of living (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 19).²² Given the study’s focus on legal governance and asylum structures, acting within the political domain is treated with a focus on the legal arenas of operation, conceptualized as inclusively and productively interacting with the mechanisms of government-body processes and the explicit rights and statuses afforded through them. Acting within the economic domain can be conceptualized as utilizing the means to maintain life, that is, participating in the production, acquisition and consumption of goods and building a livelihood in the broadest sense. Acting within the sociocultural domain can be conceptualized as engaging in customary or relational practices, that is, participating in relevant cultural rituals, behaving in domestic roles within familial units and contributing as members within broader communities or networked group of people.

²² These conceptualizations stem from components of the definitions and indicators in Holland and Brook (2004), Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Malhotra et al. (2002). The key framework authors in Narayan (2005a) also draw from these components.

In a similar way, these legal, economic or social components of living can be adjudicated or governed with respect to different levels of “administrative boundary” (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 21). These levels of social administrative organization are related to proximity of experience. The micro or local level consists of the structures of “the immediate vicinity of a person’s everyday life,” such as a family or residential community (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 21). The macro level consists of the vicinity furthest away from the individual, usually the nation-state or international community. The meso, intermediary level is somewhere in between—the familiar, but not necessarily regularly experienced vicinity, often the regional state or wider surrounding community (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 21). While investigations of individual empowerment may be contextually better suited towards examination at lower levels and collective empowerment, at higher ones (Rocha, 1997), examinations can apply to either type of actor at each level (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007).

Assets and capabilities, along with the parameters of opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes, may manifest differently across domains and levels (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 21). This is because institutions exist at these different levels of organization (Hodgson, 2006, p. 10); can dictate different means, preconditions or necessities for inclusion (Malhotra et al., 2002; Samman & Santos, 2009, p. 8) and may not always be consistent in character or implementation (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 17–8). These manifestations may come in the form of how and whether individuals engage in specific behaviors at the local level; the extent they are represented within governance structures at the meso-macro level; or the extent their participation in collectively organized groups, or aggregated knowledge about their predicaments, informs national decision making at the macro-level (Narayan, 2002, p. 20).

These factors in turn lead to determining what channels are most appropriate for change or intervention. The community-meso level, for example, provides reliable channels in many contexts for programmatic interventions to best mediate between local and national structures (Malhotra et al., 2002). These channels are often nimble enough to adjust flexibly to the local situation at hand, but strong enough to interface effectively with higher-level governance actors, especially when social ties may be strong within a marginalized group, but weakly connected to “the more extensive networks of powerful actors” (Petesch et al., 2005, p. 43–44). At the same time, collective organization originating to address problems at the local level can be remarkably effective, but certain preconditions must be present, if not entrenched, within the community, such as demonstrated trust, reliable communication channels, reciprocity and mechanisms for accountability enforcement among members (see, for example, Jagers et al., 2019; Ostrom, 1990). In a similar way, some assets or capabilities may be more salient in one domain or at one level rather than another. Empowerment, for example, in acute or emergency contexts may depend more on material resources obtained through immediate access to livelihood activities (Betts & Collier, 2017), whereas moving beyond protracted conditions of exclusion requires expanded emphasis on political rights, information understanding, social bridges and education (Ager & Strang, 2008). Each of these manifestations may be considered more problematic, banal or critical than others, depending on the context.

Although the same general assets and capabilities can be present within each domain or level of living, (emphasizing their ultimate interconnectedness), understanding where and how individuals apply their assets and capabilities to drive situationally relevant choices “can help to refine tracking, analysis, and operations” for identifying more effective entry points for interventions and improvement (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 19). Individuals may be able to apply their assets and capabilities more effectively in some areas of living as opposed to others. Similarly, levels of manifestation can better suggest specific means of intervention. Macro-level understanding, for example, points to the importance of broader historical and political context and the overall climate of policy; meso-level, the contextual mechanisms of policy implementation; and micro-level, the specific “distributional impacts of policy reform, identifying winners and losers” (World Bank, 2007, p. 31). Ultimately, analyzing these differing manifestations acknowledges the multidimensionality of empowerment and marginalization because applying resources towards choice and action is not singularly located (Malhotra et al., 2002; Samman & Santos, 2009).

National wealth in and of itself does not indicate that individuals across society live enriched lives (Sen, 1989, p. 42); enrichment and freedom are enhanced both when individuals reach “valuable [end] states,” but also when they possess diversity in opportunities to reach these end states, along with possibilities for actually choosing them (p. 48). As such, when improved conditions of agency and opportunity structure interact to produce greater degrees of choice and thereby stronger indicators of empowerment, concrete improvements manifest in the lives of marginalized groups, such as refugees, and in turn, within society at large.

Summary

The concepts reviewed in this chapter stress the interconnected nature of individual resources, governmental institutional frameworks and choice in terms of how they can drive outcomes of greater empowerment and well-being in marginalized populations, including refugees.²³ Governance structures that support the accumulation and use of material and immaterial resources, along with the ability to interact productively within these structures, foster the potential for greater choice in determining parameters of life. As such, the empowerment framework discussed and the conceptualization of its underlying components allow for a deeper investigation of where and why within the system of linkages refugees’ choices for living may appear limited or thwarted. Alsop and Norton (2004) rightly criticize that “those promoting empowerment often do so in excessively abstract terms, which are easy to dismiss or ignore;” but more clearly analyzing the hierarchy of factors influencing the degree of choice can help decipher more “viable, usable responses to exclusion and disempowerment” that are specific enough to address problems where they lie (p. 12).

Acknowledging the complementary agent-structure relationship, the empowerment framework helps account for differences in outcomes across cases of refugee living by allowing for analysis points at both agent and structure levels; marginalization is tied not only to a rote lack of resources, but also to the governmental systems frequently restricting their application. In the refugee context, “the refugee” is legislated into exclusion, distinct from a broader category of migrant who might be afforded more individual freedom in using assets and capabilities. The state becomes the builder of protracted boundaries that greatly curtail the spectrum of life possibilities. For understanding refugee life, acknowledging these interactions is critical, as empowerment possibilities are uniquely constrained by these biopolitical constructions, but their organization, strength and functioning varies under different conditions, such that greater agency may take hold and provide avenues for refugees to reclaim their lives and more easily move forward towards their goals. When these structures are more inclusive, positioning refugees not as intruders in need of conditional hospitality, but rather as creative agents who can contribute to their new societies, easier participation in community life gives way to greater possibilities to gain from mutually beneficial socioeconomic and political exchange and overcome marginalization as “others.”

The framework thus underscores that the possibilities for change in refugees’ lives are tied primarily to three key areas: 1) the assets and capabilities refugees have at their disposal (agency); 2) the institutional conditions that define their use in the bounds of daily living (opportunity structure) and 3) the ways these previous factors interact to enable or constrain successful choices in building new lives (empowerment). Differences in outcomes stem from the interactions of adequacy or deficiency in these highly interconnected areas. These interactions and complexities emphasize that empowerment is multifaceted because agency and opportunity structure are similarly multifaceted. The framework offers the possibility to examine a variety of sub-components and factors contributing to outcomes across different domains and levels of experience (Figure 2), but this does not imply rigid boundaries between them. On the contrary, the

²³ Chapter 3 discusses the application of the framework further in specific empirical detail, reviewing the broad spectrum of refugee experiences outside and within Germany.

framework emphasizes their interconnectedness by offering ways to explore how the same assets and capabilities function similarly or differently within specific areas for action, along with how governmental institutional structures may offer theoretical possibilities for life remaking within one level of structure, but lack executional function at another. Overall, this interconnectivity reveals and respects the complexity of empowerment, that it is deeper than simply avoiding destitution. Rather, it encompasses a range of material, social, cultural and psychological components of fulfillment and action across various ways of living, that are not only often blurred and overlapping, but change circumstantially and depend heavily on individual context.

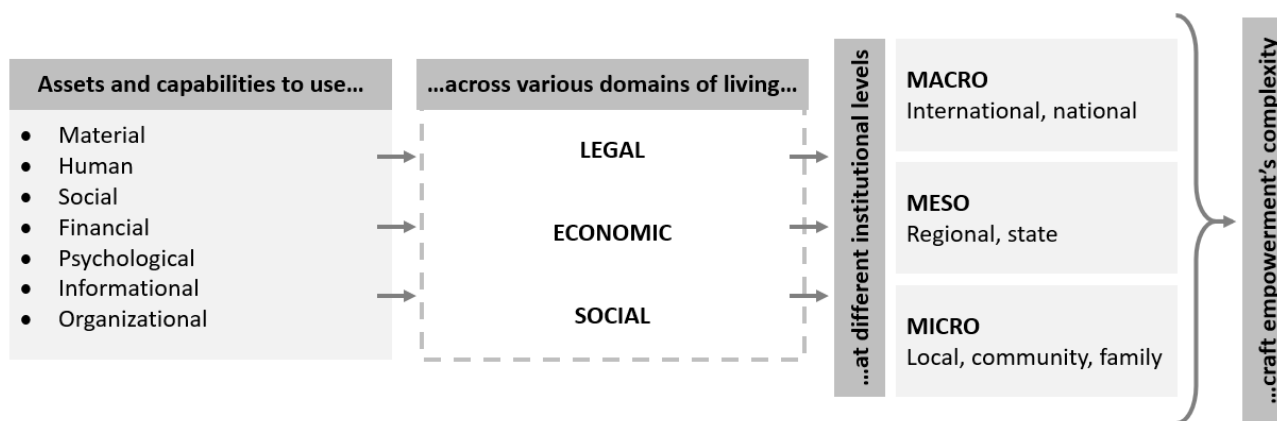


Figure 2. Types of assets and capabilities within and across different domains and institutional levels (author consolidation).

The interactions of these complex components drive differences in quality of life, for refugees specifically and other marginalized groups generally. A better understanding of the specific needs of refugees can come from insight into both the challenges they report, along with the solutions they drive themselves to address their socioeconomic needs and enhance their capabilities. Knowing how this occurs within the limits and opportunities of the institutional framework can help guide more contextually relevant interventions and better evaluate their effectiveness (Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002). The importance of understanding the reasons for these differences to find possible ways to address them that promote a “truly human mode of functioning” for all (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 82). It is a mode of living in which all people are able to construct life in reciprocity with others as opposed to merely being shaped by them, and it is the responsibility of governmental institutions to ensure this occurs. This responsibility is more acute with regards to refugees—who flee for protection from governments neglecting this duty and seeking their harm—because “a government that makes available only a reduced and animal-like mode of [...] healthy living, or sensing, has not done enough” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 82).

3. Examining Empowerment Outcomes in International and German Refugee Experiences

Building upon the concepts and framework in the prior theoretical chapter, this chapter reviews empirically how the interconnected nature of assets, capabilities and governance frameworks influences empowerment outcomes in global situations of refugee living. The conceptual approach posits that the more that biopolitical execution of state power positions refugees as outsiders who must be excluded—intentionally or otherwise—from the broader social order, the more agency is constrained within those structures and choice-driven outcomes for change impeded. At the same time, as agency and opportunity structures are interconnected, individuals’ daily life activities and responses to such constraints, voids, inadequacies and openings for participation around them may also reveal avenues for the application of their assets and capabilities towards inclusion and overcoming marginalization.

Empirically looking across international cases of refugees’ experience, the chapter first reviews driving factors of empowerment outcomes. As the framework suggests, limited possibilities for choice application have the clearest roots within the most exclusionary opportunity structures. When refugees are legally (ex., through explicit restrictions on activities) and physically (ex., through separated encampment) denied the most basic rights or permissions to act, the most empowered choices for moving forward may be more unlikely, whether or not humanitarian aid is provided. Structurally-based opening points to promote empowerment tend to converge on either experiencing more overt legal inclusivity in general or taking advantage of break down points in the implementation and cohesion of policy. Certain components of agency—such as the right circumstantial collection of human capital (ex., language or professional) skills, cohesive social networks, shared cultural knowledge and psychological hope—can influence how opening points may be addressed or navigated. Indicators of well-being reveal nearly universal outcomes in which refugees are worse off than other migrants or citizens, but greater empowerment can be driven through optimally constructed opportunity structures that capitalize on elements of refugees’ agency, including their preferences and aspirations, as well as local living conditions. They also balance measures of state support with refugees’ frequently reported desires to move beyond aid or welfare. Finally, when refugees themselves lack the resources or legal positioning to reach an end, they may capitalize on connections to other intermediaries more empowered to bridge such deficiencies.

After discussing this broad empirical spectrum of experience, the chapter introduces the German case, offering a brief history of post-war German refugee policy and contextualizing the recent influx of refugee migration beginning in 2015. Germany’s historically contentious attitudes towards migration have laid foundations for more rigid policy systems and constraints on life outcomes, but modern commitments to breaking these historical precedents and acknowledging the demographic reality of migration experience within the German population have also given way to more fundamentally humanitarian provisioning and expansion of refugee rights. In Cologne, a politically progressive city where over 40% of the residents have a migration background, historical prevalence of refugee advocacy and high levels of civic engagement have created a municipal policy climate more sympathetic towards refugee inclusion and integrative support.

Given this context, the chapter then reviews existing empirical research on agency and institutional elements defining and shaping the German refugee experience at the country level, examining how German refugees may be broadly positioned to be empowered or not. A review of existing research suggests that in Germany, refugees’ material and immaterial resources at hand are not entirely deprived, especially with regards to human capital from origin countries they might apply in their new host communities and often high levels of aspirational capacity upon immediate arrival. Even so, refugees still experience other potential threats to their asset and capability repository, including depressed physical health, rudimentary living

conditions, subsistence-driven economic resources and lack of information about their living conditions that often negatively influence psychological health and longer-term outlooks on life after arrival. At the same time, opportunity structures remain closed to entry points for refugee-driven situational manipulation, as well as complex in their administration. Actors within civil society may be positioned to act as interlocutors, often more empowered than refugees to fill in resource or structural gaps. Statistics and limited research in Cologne’s context point to similar local trends applying to refugees in the municipal context.

Ultimately, governance that supports the accumulation and use of agency as material and immaterial resources, along with the ability to interact productively within these structures, fosters the potential for greater choice in structuring life. Based on these conditions, this review aims to explore how these factors, tendencies and characteristics are situated to drive outcomes within one local context.

3.1 Reviewing empowerment possibilities across international cases of refugee life

Using the framework as grounding, it is first necessary to consider how the spectrum of empowerment outcomes and driving factors present empirically within the broad landscape of refugee research.²⁴ The number of refugee migrants, along with the associated challenges of their associated governance regimes, continues to grow. As of 2020, UNHCR estimates that over 26 million legally labelled refugees, 4 million registered asylum seekers and 4 million stateless individuals live as a result of forced displacement across the world (UNHCR, 2020). Although just 10 countries host around 57% of all the world’s refugees (Table 2), and countries within the Global South, 84% (Awad & Natarajan, 2018), different manifestations of agency, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes are still present across cases.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF REFUGEES	INCOME STATUS
Turkey	3.6 million	Upper-middle
Jordan	2.9 million	Upper-middle
Columbia	1.7 million	Upper-middle
Pakistan	1.4 million	Lower-middle
Lebanon	1.4 million	Upper-middle
Uganda	1.4 million	Low
Germany	1.1 million	High
Sudan	1 million	Low
Iran	.98 million	Upper-middle
Bangladesh	.85 million	Lower-middle

Table 2. Top-10 countries with highest numbers of legally labeled refugees (Amnesty International, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

3.1.1 Converging towards normalcy on the spectrum of deprivation to innovation

UNHCR estimates almost 80% of the world’s refugees live in protracted situations (displaced >5 years), and around 25% have been displaced longer than 20 years (UNHCR, 2018b). Whether in decentralized urban or camp settings—where around 40%²⁵ of refugees live (UNHCR, 2018b)—many examples of refugee life incur conditions of acute suffering, in which refugees lack material and immaterial resources, legal ways to apply them and possibilities to engage with the governance structures influencing their use. Reduced empowerment outcomes can consist of protracted poverty (Crisp, 2003; Jacobsen, 2002), depressed health and increased mortality (Spiegel, Checchi, Colombo, & Paik, 2010; Toole & Waldman,

²⁴ As noted in “Notes on the Use of Refugee Terminology,” as well in the Introduction (p. 3), this chapter refers to *refugees* as individuals migrating and living under asylum schemes, regardless of stage in the process. Specific delineations are made in terminology when the distinction is relevant. Literature within the review tends to follow this convention, calling out asylum seekers as unique sub-groups only when specific distinctions are found or apparent.

²⁵ Although data is difficult to consolidate, UNHCR (2018b, p. 57, 62) estimates around 60% of the world’s refugees live in decentralized urban settings, a number that continues to grow faster than that of refugees in camp settings.

1997), compromised holistic well-being (Bruijn, 2009; Crea, Calvo, & Loughry, 2015; Marsella, Bornemann, Ekblad, & Orley, 1994; Vossoughi, Jackson, Gusler, & Stone, 2018) and complex political and sociocultural subjugation advanced by different actors (Crisp, 2003; Feldman, 2015; Hyndman, 1997; Omata, 2017a).

At the same time, empirical literature tends to avoid casting even extreme outcomes as a total absence of agency or total governmental, structural exclusion (Bradley, 2014). Although the political and material bounds of refugee living are often holistically exclusionary or dehumanizing (Betts & Collier, 2017; Turner, 2016), in reality, refugee living spaces tend to be “highly nuanced” arenas of being in which refugees’ actions, participations and manipulations of social, economic and political conditions of their living are observable to some degree, even if limited or highly conditional on circumstance (Black, 2019, p. 83–84). Neglecting the interplay of these complexities can ignore the diverse realities of shelter, camp and provisioning models that exist around the world (Ek, 2006; Flynn, 2012), but also run the risk of reducing diverse refugee populations to mass, helpless collectives (Malkki, 1996; Rajaram, 2002) or trivializing even more severe examples of human rights abuses (e.g., genocide, mass forced slave labor) (Levy, 2010).

More accurately, from an empirical perspective, different elements of agency or opportunity structure contextually emerge to show capacities for influencing possible empowered outcomes. As the framework suggests, more limited possibilities—resulting in the aforementioned worse outcomes—have the clearest roots within the most exclusionary opportunity structures. When refugees are legally and structurally denied basic rights—as is frequently done both before and after formal adjudication of claims (if such adjudication occurs at all)—the most empowered choices for moving forward may be fundamentally unlikely, whether or not humanitarian aid is provided (Omata, 2017a; Smulovitz, 2003). Many of these restrictions stem from broader problems within host-country governance structures (Bruijn, 2009; Chambers, 1986). Low- and middle-income countries host around 85% of the world’s refugees and the least developed countries, around 28% (Bahar & Dooley, 2020). Ongoing conditions of civil war, political turmoil and fragile statehood in many of these nations have already induced vulnerabilities in both host populations, as well as refugee populations before their migrations (Toole & Waldman, 1997; UNHCR, 2019). As a result, broader governance issues involving situations of acute humanitarian need are common, especially as many such countries struggle to provide for their native and refugee populations (Awad & Natarajan, 2018; Bahar & Dooley, 2020; Betts & Collier, 2017; Loescher, Frelick, Edminster, Milner, & Catz, 2003; Loescher & Milner, 2007; Purkey, 2014; Spiegel et al., 2010). Levels of political conflict have also been associated with tightening asylum policies (Bernhard & Kaufmann, 2017). These conditions are also related to the inability of the international community to alleviate them, creating multiple layers of policy failure and exclusion to overcome through the application of agency (Barnett, 2002; Crisp, 2003; Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2014; Odutayo, 2016). These broader political instabilities may also give way to cases in which no clear legal solutions apply to a specific refugee population, for example, when the origin country rejects repatriation possibilities; a host country accepts refugees but espouses no political will to adjudicate their claims or integrate them; or legal asylum in a different desired country is not supported through its structures.²⁶

Exclusionary legal opportunity structures can also be advanced through highly regimented governance in camp or shelter administration, leading to spatial components of living arrangements that promote the physical exclusion and totalistic management of individuals, regardless of their specific legal status while living in camps (Katz, 2017; Kreichauf, 2018). For example, when camps are organized around the physical isolation or obvious separation of refugees (i.e., through fences) and/or prioritize the utilitarian provision of mere shelter without adequate space for leisure, cultural, cooking or other personal activities (Katz, 2017), explicit division of refugee groups is perpetuated through (sometimes violent) forms of control over many elements of daily living (Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Minca, 2015). In some cases, the exclusionary

²⁶ Hajj (2014) and Ramadan (2013) cite Palestinian refugees as an example, given international reluctance to acknowledge Palestine as a state, Israel’s hostility towards Palestinians and Lebanon’s resistance towards formally integrating Palestinian refugees despite cultural similarities and desires of Palestinians to settle there.

nature of these types of camps or detention centers is heightened because they are funded by governments, but outside the jurisdiction of their courts or national systems of regulation (Peterie, 2018; Turner, 2005), cutting off refugees from more complete sets of legal rights or even entitlements afforded to jailed prisoners (Diken, 2004). This may also place camp administration outside federal channels of oversight that might better constrain abuse (Luan, 2018; Peterie, 2018).

As such, many applications of (especially collective) agency in these contexts—whether advanced by camp managers or camp residents in micro-communities—serve to act as further mechanisms of exclusion, as they “simultaneously operate according to [these] specific structures of power, often reproducing, at a smaller scale and in the constrained spatiality of the camp, practices of implicit and explicit violence towards non-compliant members of the community or towards other communities” making the structures substantially difficult to breach (Carter-White & Minca, 2020, p. 8). Long-term living within these types of camp or shelter conditions, apart from individual legal status, is in and of itself found to delay job market entry and general participation in integration activities (Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Lawrence, 2016). This is especially true when geographic isolation of camps, and material poverty within them (due to either limited internal provisioning or limited physical ability to reach work outside), curtails the capacity of refugees to act as consumers and market participants, reducing material assets and agency components even further (Viswanathan, Sreekumar, & Arias, 2017).

Opportunity structures that explicitly forbid (or make exceptionally difficult) specific applications of agency also have clear influence on the possibilities of empowered life outcomes. Unrealistic possibilities for quick, transparent and fair asylum case adjudication; explicit failure to adhere with national or international directives for standards of provisioning; and questionably legal detention policies can drastically curtail the pursuit of basic life activities (Nieminen, 2019, p. 13, 15; Purkey, 2014). Forbidding freedom of movement, forcing camp accommodation and denying health care access can be the cause of substandard physical conditions of living in refugee communities (such as lack of sanitation, nutrition and healthcare access) that depress physical health and abilities, as well as mental resilience, to apply moving forward (Nieminen, 2019; Spiegel et al., 2010). Policies restricting or discouraging certain demographic groups (i.e., female, homo-/bi-/transsexual, disabled individuals) from formal participation in certain areas of living (i.e., education) place additional exclusionary burdens on them, preventing access to certain structures of life improvement (Buscher, 2011; Liebige & Tronstad, 2018; Mirza, 2010). Explicit prohibitions on activities may or may not be alleviated with changes in legal status from asylum seeker to formally recognized refugee (Nieminen, 2019).

The explicit lack of legal right to work—despite being a standard of the Refugee Convention—is also a common driver of reduced choices within all stages of asylum-seeking processes. Even when legal right to work is not forbidden, countless other conditions can drastically limit livelihood opportunities in a formal sense (ex., by legally limiting to only certain sectors) or discourage them in an informal sense via implementation or access barriers (Wirth, Defilippis, & Therkelsen, 2014). Lengthy asylum procedures cause reductions in employment rates across all groups of refugees, regardless of sociodemographic characteristics (Hainmueller et al., 2016). Even after asylum cases have been formally adjudicated, structures that do not acknowledge foreign credentials or offer clear pathways to execute work rights (ex., through education, training or citizenship opportunities) can lead to high levels of unemployment and reduced wages (Bonfantii & Xenogiani, 2014), as well as employers’ preferences to eschew refugee hiring (Picot & Sweetman, 2011).

At the same time, it is often the depoliticizing or dehumanizing nature of conditions that give way towards refugees’ resistance to them and compulsion to attempt ways of confronting, protesting or changing them (Bergman, 2010; Bradley, 2014; Cantat, 2016; Dadusc & Mudu, 2020; Holzer, 2013; Omata, 2017a; Owens, 2009). Therefore, although the presence of these exclusionary qualities in opportunity structure can potentially curtail agency application, they do not eliminate it (Turner, 2016). Indeed, as the framework suggests, failures in mechanisms of or explicit openings within state control may open pathways “conducive to the very [...] illicit activities they seek to avoid” (Hunter, 2009, p. 13). Such opening points tend

to concentrate around either experiencing more structural inclusivity in general (especially when boundaries between political inclusion and exclusion are blurry) or taking advantage of break down points in the implementation and cohesion of policy.

Explicit structural inclusivity offers the clearest means to more effectively apply agency to reach goals and drive choice. Aside from the potential wider array of explicit possibilities they can afford, easy access to citizenship channels or open, permissive legal residency structures, for example, support integration in that they contribute to feelings of political or national belonging (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Purkey, 2014), as well as reduce refugees' anxiety and bolster confidence in taking decisions or feeling motivated to move forward (Nunn, McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2015). Additionally, recalling possible capitalization of translocational positionality, refugees may also be able to better their circumstances when they can draw upon multiple points of structural or legal inclusion, such as dual entitlements through UNHCR or charitable provisioning groups, but also national governments (Holzer, 2013; La Chau & Haugh, 2020; Oesch, 2017; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, 2017).²⁷ As TSOs continue to play more prominent roles in refugee provisioning, their direct presence in refugee spaces (Garkisch, Heidingsfelder, & Beckmann, 2017; Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015; Nawyn, 2010) can similarly create areas for inclusion and "geographies of welcome" (Sparke, 2018, p. 1). When interactions between refugees and TSO actors are collaborative and inclusive of refugee preferences and regardless of legal status, they can support the construction of more ideally desired spaces (such as clinics, classrooms, kitchens and gardens) and act as an "island of limited enfranchisement [...] and hope" (Sparke, 2018, p. 1).

Even so, this increase in TSO-support structures contributes to simultaneously growing complexity in refugee governance structures in general (Agier, 2011; Barnett, 2013; Hyndman, 1997). As more governance actors infiltrate the refugee management space, the likelihood of inefficiencies and implementation difficulties increases (Clarke, 2018), especially as TSOs grow and incur state-like organizational problems such as bureaucracy, conditional resource application and unclear accountability measures (Al-Dasouqi, 2016, p. 24–25; Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2007; see also, Salvatici, 2012). These breakdowns may occur in the form of inconsistently administered rules or services (Clarke, 2018); an inability to police camp or refugee activities (Clarke, 2018); inadequate grievance practices, poor communications systems (Holzer, 2012); or irrelevantly implemented camp leadership policies (Omata, 2017b). As such, individual or groups of refugees within these types of settings may either be able to fill in these gaps, increasing their empowerment through their own explicit entrepreneurial processes of problem identification, scale and innovation (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, & Omata, 2016; Betts, Bloom, & Omata, 2012; Betts, Bloom, & Weaver, 2015); taking advantage of governance blind spots that cannot or do not oversee certain activities (Bulley, 2014; La Chau & Haugh, 2014, 2020) or creating systematic cracks in the means of control through organized protest or more explicit defiance behavior, when the qualities of their organizational capital meet sufficient conditions (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020; Kibreab, 2004). At the same time, the presence of such gaps or cracks does not necessarily assure that activity can exist to fill them or that they will be successful (Mair & Marti, 2009). Any new structural arrangements must still become salient and legitimate within the community (Mair, Marti, & Ventresca, 2012), offering broad safety from harm and promoting more equitable ends from the perspectives of refugee community members (Holzer, 2013).

Understandably, certain components of agency can influence how empowerment conditions might be enhanced. Human capital assets and capabilities play a significant role in circumventing governance barriers or capitalizing on breakdown points. Language knowledge, along with skill and education levels, are often contributing factors (Connor, 2010; Waxman, 2001). In developed country contexts especially (ex., OECD countries), employment rates of refugees with work rights might be 10 percentage points higher if

²⁷ Such dual points are apparent when refugees are afforded additional rights as citizens or residents, by virtue of their refugee status. Palestinian refugees in Jordan or Cuban refugees in the United States are good examples, as they have been granted more generous entitlements due to having migrated from specific countries (Oesch, 2017; Zeller, 2019).

refugees had near-native command of host country languages (OECD, 2016). Similarly, refugees arriving after age 12 or speaking languages significantly different than host-country ones have poorer labor market outcomes than those migrating younger or speaking similar languages (OECD, 2018). In developing country contexts, higher levels of functional skills, professional education and literacy may contribute to identifying gaps in opportunity structures in terms of increasing motivation to work outside camp settings, access information about employment laws, gain new skills to find employment and construct entrepreneurial endeavors within camp contexts (Khawaja, 2003; OECD, 2019, p. 38; UNHCR, 2017; Werker, 2007; World Bank, 2018). Early education of refugee children often promotes similar outcomes (Crul et al., 2019).

Like components of human capital, individual psychological factors also contribute to exploiting structural entry points or enhancing individual empowerment outcomes (Kallio, Meier, & Häkli, 2020). Higher personal tolerance for risk, for example, motivates many refugees to find ways to work or live for extended periods without formally adjudicated claims (Grabska, 2005, 2006), bolstered by weak legal structures that simultaneously support such practices (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016a, 2016b). Especially in lengthy protracted situations in which legal status remains unclear, a psychological compulsion towards feeling normalcy may compel participation in (often legally unauthorized) processes of consumption and exchange (Dzeamesi, 2008; Oka, 2014). Over time, these psychological compulsions can even become rooted within cultural identities and encompass shared “hope, longing, desire or dream to go for resettlement” within a particular group of refugee individuals (Horst, 2006a, p. 143).

Similarly, fragmented (as opposed to executionally cohesive) systems of camp governance (in the form of poor formal leadership coordination and accountability) can also awaken the application of social or organizational assets (Clarke, 2018). Common knowledge of origin-country customs, practices or even legal regulations, for example, can lead to organic formation of refugee-driven property and commerce management systems in camps in the absence of formally regulated ones (Agier, 2011; Hajj, 2017; Horst, 2006b). Strong concepts of shared ethno-national identities and histories can facilitate the formation and utilization of strong camp social networks, neighborhoods and community gathering spaces that reappropriate often under-monitored spaces (Bulley, 2014; Malkki, 1995a; Peteet, 2009; Ramadan, 2013). Especially in these under-monitored spaces, such as informally-built settlements where refugees themselves collect local materials for living and building, collective social activity can more easily take hold to create areas for cooking, leisure or gathering activities, as they have originated from refugee-centered design (Agier, 2002; Katz, 2017; Singh, 2020). As these refugee-created spaces grow, there is also more room for gray-market business innovators, camp problem solvers and formerly prominent families to assert themselves as leaders to mobilize others in refugee-driven initiatives for protest and change (Clarke, 2018).

More international institutions and governments are attempting to understand and account for these complex agent-structure interplays, emphasizing the importance of more inclusive approaches to refugee governance (UNHCR, 2006). They are also acknowledging the necessity of shifting from viewing refugees as victims who must be saved by the state to agents who have the capacity to affect change in their immediate communities (Easton-Calabria, 2015). But as this empirical review suggests, more optimal outcomes of such policy shifts will stem from commitments to build more open structures with fewer explicit prohibitions on life possibilities that allow individuals to more easily apply the assets and capabilities at their disposal. Carrera, Blockmans, Steven, Gros and Guild (2015) describe such interplays quite clearly:

[Refugee] policy responses need to move from a security-centric focus towards a multi-sector policy approach guaranteeing a balanced setting of priorities across all relevant policy sectors such as development cooperation, foreign affairs, trade, economic, as well as social and employment considerations. All these responses should fully guarantee a fundamental human rights compliant focus, so that their effects over individuals' well-being and lives are properly and systematically prioritized over other sectoral policy considerations and interests (p. 20).

3.1.2 Optimizing interactions of self-application, support and inclusivity

The ideal case for refugee living represents a situation of convergence with the local population. When agency is high and opportunity structure open or inclusive, refugees simply have more possibilities to choose how to overcome challenges and live life more like those around them, working towards rebuilding and replicating what they likely already did in their origin countries (Aleinikoff, 2015, p. 3).

However given the challenging outcomes of refugee governance across the world—in which refugees suffer from persistent, often long-term poorer conditions of health (Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2008; Giuntella, Kone, Ruiz, & Vargas-Silva, 2018), employment rates and financial earnings (Bevelander, 2016; Brell, Dustmann, & Preston, 2020; Connor, 2010; Fasani, Frattini, & Minale, 2018; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018; Waxman, 2001), rights (Betts & Collier, 2017; Nyers, 2013) and general means of socioeconomic participation (Jacobsen, 2002, 2005; Werker, 2007), compared to both citizens and other types of migrants in host countries—it is unlikely that such an ideal case exists in entirety. These trends and disparities hold true across similar measures even in more economically developed OECD countries (OECD, 2019). The previous section presents an overview of specific elements of agency or opportunity structure contributing to possibilities for empowerment enhancement. However, additional studies point to specific ways that these elements work together to shape more empowered means with which refugees can rebuild their lives. Empirical evidence for the synthesizing agency- and opportunity-structure qualities driving more empowered outcomes concentrates around the following key points.

First, more optimally constructed and executed governance structures align with elements of refugees' agency, especially their goals, preferences and aspirations. When policy and provisioning structures are explicitly designed to bolster the choices of individuals in rebuilding their lives, greater economic independence and deeper community involvement often result (Castles, Korac, Vasta, & Vertovec, 2002; Easton-Calabria et al., 2017; Tomlinson & Egan, 2016), which can lay better foundations for long-term socioeconomic stability and integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). As correct expectations and motivation contribute to helping refugees improve their economic circumstances (Connor, 2010; Cortes, 2004; Waxman, 2001), support structures are more effective when they explicitly help clarify, set and actually implement these goals (Atwell, Gifford, & McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009; Erden, 2017), especially when they utilize culturally specific (e.g., religiously or spiritually motivated) means to enhance refugees' hope that a better life is possible (Barnes & Aguilar, 2007). Other studies find greater measures of program- and refugee-evaluated success when refugees' preferences, individual qualities and aspirations more closely align with the design of opportunity structures to accommodate refugees' unique needs, for example, in settings of early childhood education (Boit, Conlin, Barnes, & Hestenes, 2020; Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2016), the pursuit of university education (Shapiro, 2019), local emergency financial aid interventions (Cheng & Chudoba, 2003), psycho-social services like familial counseling (Olwig, 2011), refugee shelter activity programs (Bergman, 2010) and job-matching initiatives (O'Donovan & Sheikh, 2014; OECD & UNHCR, 2018). When employment interventions are involved, those which consider cultural and familial preferences can result in not only greater rates of workforce participation, but more enthusiastic participation that inspires individual confidence and desire to participate in community life (Harkins, 2012; Ui, 1991).

Similarly, optimal structures take into account local conditions of resource availability and actual possibilities for agency applications. For example, multi-site research on refugee communities in Uganda, Kenya, Jordan, South Africa and the United States has shown improvements in household income, growth in local enterprises and better provisioning of public goods when governance structures have promoted entrepreneurial and innovation efforts concentrated within refugee communities designed to solve locally oriented problems (Betts et al., 2015; Betts et al., 2016; HIP, 2017). Similarly, assessments of other refugee support programs in Tanzania, Guinea, southern Sudan and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have found that "inadequate understanding of and adaptation to the local context" has resulted in implementation failures because solutions have not been relevant to local refugee populations (Jacobsen,

2005, p. 69–87, 86). Specific evaluations of successes and failures of provisioning for Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire (Kuhlman, 2002; UNHCR, 2006) and Guatemalan refugees (Cheng & Chudoba, 2003) in the late 1990s have shown that the most successful programs “focused on assisting an activity which local people were already undertaking and supported solutions found by refugees themselves, rather than designing new ones for them” (UNHCR, 2006, p. 29). In more recent contexts, job-matching programs are found to be more effective when refugees’ skills align with the composition of local industries (OECD & UNHCR, 2018). In other instances, refugees may highly value or prefer the material (e.g., financial, land, livelihood incentives) and immaterial (e.g., citizenship rights, sense of ethno-national belonging) resources afforded to them through repatriation (Bradley, 2013), making safe return programs a potentially productive option in circumstances where refugees view them as such (Cheng & Chudoba, 2003).

Another key thematic point from literature suggests that opportunity structures should not presume or orient themselves to the notion that refugees want to be, or remain wholly dependent, on aid. Often related to the nativist and protectionist goals of state policy seeking to prioritize provisioning and protection for its own citizens (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020; Loescher & Milner, 2007; Nyers, 2013), as well as the humanitarian industrial complex (Barnett, 2011; Dadusc & Mudu, 2020; Hayter, 2016) that oversees a vast landscape of refugee provisioning in situations taken well-beyond their acute emergency states (Aleinikoff, 2015; Betts & Collier, 2017), policy often defaults to ignore refugees “as real or potential contributors to the public wealth” (Bloch & Schuster, 2016, p. 404). Literature, however, finds evidence of the mutual benefits for refugees and host societies when policy gives way to more productive means of participating in host country life (Jacobsen, 2006, 2014; UNHCR, 2006). Lengthy administration of exclusive care and maintenance programs, as opposed to those supporting more choice in relevant livelihood activity, have been generally evaluated as an impediment, rather than enhancer, of socioeconomic integration (Kuhlman, 2002, p. 4). When refugees are more able to manage their own lives and utilize local government services alongside nationals, the strategy has generally resulted in greater mobility, lower transaction costs for economic activity, higher incomes and more flexible, sustainable sources of employment (Betts, Chaara, Omata, & Sterck, 2019, p. 4). Refugees also often report that they do not like the feeling of “getting something for nothing” and want to contribute to their host communities in exchange for the support, help and protection received (Hunt, 2008, p. 287). When they are able to do so through meaningful pursuits, they report feeling more settled, more engaged locally and even as if they are “socially thriving” in giving back (Hunt, 2008, p. 288). Psychological satisfaction is derived from the elements of more independent living, whether generated through participation in volunteer activity (Al Munajed, 2020), permanent community living (Porter & Haslam, 2005), employment (Burchett & Matheson, 2010), transformative learning (Hess et al., 2014) or contributory status within the family (Olwig, 2011; Ui, 1991).

At the same time, literature also reveals that policies should not over-emphasize the complete self-reliance of refugees in that they should be completely cut off from any types of interventions or resource-related aid. Rather, they should recognize that various dimensions of policy must align to create an optimal balance of state-instigated support with refugees’ own application and development of resources. Robust effectiveness measures of specific livelihood development programs, for example, are frequently lacking (Aleinikoff, 2015). Failure is a frequent occurrence in many self-reliance focused intervention programs (Easton-Calabria et al., 2017; Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018). This is despite the strategy employed, and failure occurs across programs involving more transparent access to government services (Kaiser, 2006), microfinance (Phillips, 2004), skills training (Weaver & Russell, 2017) or imposition of income-generating activities in camp or shelter settings (Chalamwong, Thabchumpon, & Chantavanich, 2014). Failures can largely be traced back to a lack of a holistic “enabling environment” (Hunter, 2009, p. 7; see also, Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018). Such an enabling environment includes both resource and policy components applicable to all stages of legal asylum processes (Kaiser, 2006). Resource components include access to financial tools, affordable housing, higher-quality living spaces, access to relevant land and food security;

policy components include building healthy macro-level socioeconomic conditions that encourage these ends to promote stable livelihoods and more receptive local community attitudes (Hunter, 2009, p. 7; UNHCR, 2002, 2014). Policy that assumes that refugees out to be “held almost entirely responsible for achieving their [own] economic autonomy” is likely due to fail because it is “closely linked with minimal state assistance” (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, p. 1468, 1467) and ignores better alignment of various structural conditions and harmonious policy goals (Carrera et al., 2015). More effective independence and self-reliance strategies should recast themselves to consider how refugees might better succeed with the relevant forms, degrees and time periods of state assistance, in line with how social support is provided to citizens and other residents in host countries (ECRE, 1998; UN, 2015). Such models of provisioning can also better take into account the specific psychological, physical, financial and linguistic challenges frequently faced by refugees due to the unique nature of forced flight (Connor, 2010). When these conditions are not fulfilled, refugees may feel compelled—either through desperation or legal requirements—to take the first employment they can find, which is frequently menial employment that correlates with long-term low wages, reduced earning power and future job immobility (Connor, 2010). Policy’s overemphasis on self-reliance has also been associated with reductions in language acquisition, ability to obtain affordable housing and feelings of integration (Saksena & McMorrow, 2020).

Finally, when refugees themselves lack the resources or structural, legal positioning to be able to reach an end, they may capitalize on intermediary actors who do and can bridge such deficiencies. In the refugee context, such intermediary actors may include specific government case workers (Dahlvik, 2017, 2018), volunteers (Witcher, 2020), refugee community representatives in camp settings (Clarke, 2018; Dzeamesi, 2008; Feldman, 2015) and/or well-positioned TSO actors (Darrow, 2015; Erden, 2017; Garkisch et al., 2017; Üstübici, 2020). Such intermediaries often act as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), positioned to advance specific policies or initiatives at an on-the-ground tactical level (Darrow, 2015), take liberties on individual applications of policies or claims (Dahlvik, 2018) and even shape community attitudes towards refugees through individual inclusionary or exclusionary decision making (Bhatia, 2020; Borrelli, 2019).

In application, connections to these individuals also frequently help refugees realize practical, substantive ends or move through specific steps in asylum and integration processes, which they often cannot do alone (Ager & Strang, 2008). Charity organizations and engaged volunteers, for example, are frequent sources of assistance not only for accessing concrete material resources, but also for learning about often complex ways to move through entry points into specific governance systems (e.g., public education) (Garkisch et al., 2017). The correct type of bridging connections towards relevant employers or individuals who might help with job assistance is similarly critical in helping refugees across a variety of settings become meaningfully employed (Campion, 2018; Lamba & Krahn, 2003; OECD & UNHCR, 2018; Verwiebe et al., 2018). In fact, in some cases, refugees prioritize developing a network of potential bridging connections more so than they do searching for a relevant job themselves (Campion, 2018), especially in host-country contexts in which connections to ethnically-based or other refugee networks may not always facilitate advancing employment goals (Lamba, 2003). Psychologically, individualized help from these types of actors can make refugees feel as if they are actively utilizing partnerships to move forward in their lives as opposed to “becom[ing] trapped in the role of passive recipients of aid” (Harkins, 2012, p. 194). They can also assist in forming emotional connections with the wider population, which fosters a sense of ethno-national belonging and reduce feelings of isolation (Ager, Malcom, Sadollah, & O'May, 2002; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014).

As the review highlights, clear channels for empowered change are supported through more open, inclusive governance structures that drive greater choice in utilizing means of self-improvement and applying assets and capabilities. When structures are more exclusionary, certain components of agency—such as the right collection of human capital (ex., language or professional) skills, cohesive social networks, shared cultural knowledge and psychological hope—can influence how possible break-down points may be addressed, as can the characteristics and functions of intermediary actors positioned within these structures.

3.2 Setting the context of empowerment possibilities in the German case

Since 2015, nearly 2 million individuals have pursued asylum claims in Germany (BAMF, 2020a), and more individuals are living with protection-related statuses (Table 3). In 2015 alone, over 890,000 individuals migrating as refugees crossed the border and filed nearly 500,000 formal applications. As Germany has processed the highest annual numbers of applications in the history of the republic (Trines, 2017), its leaders have also challenged other EU nations to prioritize welcoming asylum seekers (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016).

	Total	Open cases	RECOGNIZED STATUS		REJECTED
			Asylum protection status and humanitarian resettlement	Follow-on permanent residency	Total
2014	746,320	177,900	460,140	251,675	108,280
2015	1,036,235	349,810	547,935	262,130	138,495
2016	1,597,570	574,945	867,500	268,265	155,120
2017	1,680,700	348,640	1,154,365	266,010	177,700
2018	1,781,750	306,095	1,283,225	265,465	192,430

Table 3. Total number of individuals seeking and living with protection and rejection statuses in Germany, 2014 – 2018. All numbers shown (current as of 20 November, 2020) are reproduced from publicly available data at the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis) data generator site (<https://www-genesis.destatis.de/>). Note that humanitarian resettlement statuses are obtained separately from the standard asylum-migration process. Destatis does not make the distinction in this reporting.

Even so, the case of German refugee policy and the recent influx of refugee migration possesses a unique sociopolitical duality in which to explore a unique contextual study of agency, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes in refugee living. In Germany, historical state attitudes to migration have been somewhat contentious. Despite immigration driving around 80% of population growth between 1950 and 1993, governments have persistently espoused the paradoxical notion that Germany is not a country of immigration (*kein Einwanderungsland*), placing migrants outside the institutionalized scope of “national self-definition” (Joppke, 1999, p. 62). At the same time, Germany has also been a predominant recipient of asylum seekers in Europe for upwards of 20 years (UNHCR, 2001), with strong constitutional protections for the right to claim it. Throughout the recent influx years (2015–2018), Germany has similarly dominated the EU-28 in terms of accepting the most first-time asylum applications (Eurostat, 2020).

Nonetheless, despite Germany’s position as a world cultural and economic power without the abject-poverty or population-wide survival crises facing refugees in developing nations, Germany’s refugee migrants are not removed from the same broader institutional difficulties, such as limitations on the freedom of movement, access to the labor market and procedural efficiency. The German case reveals that a resource-rich environment alone is not enough to guarantee more inclusive outcomes from refugee migration as opposed to other types, implying that specific qualities of institutional structures also interact in critical ways in determining how and under what conditions choices and empowerment outcomes can change. The remainder of this chapter explores the context of the German case more thoroughly, first providing historical and current contextual overviews and then discussing empirical literature reviewing the current state of agency, opportunity structures and empowerment outcomes in the country thus far.

3.2.1 Conflicts in German refugee policy in the post-war years

Lack of inclusion in the state-negotiated terms of refugeehood has been consistent in the historical development of post-World War II German refugee policy. Germany has long been a nation defined by ethnicity as opposed to “common creed,” resulting in “extraordinarily high barriers for the admission of new members” (Joppke, 1999, p. 8). Since the formal establishment of *jus sanguinis* citizenship structures in 1818, belonging as a German has encompassed possessing an inherent, inborn nature of the *Volk* and being a member of the “union of a group of people with a transcendental essence” (Green, 2004, p. 28). At the

same time, general migration policies in the post-war years have promoted simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of migrants, both inviting their presence and offering some rights and benefits, but also denying their holistic place within German society (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007). As Joppke (1999) describes, “The discrepancy between de facto immigration and its political denial is the single most enduring puzzle in the German immigration debate” (p. 62). This has been advanced through political positioning separating a utilitarian economic or structural need for migration from embracing it as a cultural or normative ideal with which to build a nation state (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007; Green, 2013; Joppke, 1999). Overall, this conflicting outsider-insider ethos has set precedence for exclusion that has contributed to various conditions and contentions in the modern setting of refugee governance.

Immediately following the war, migration was dominated primarily by repatriation, as 14 million members of German minorities without formal German citizenship (*Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche*) returned from Eastern, Central Eastern and Southern Europe (Schneider & Engler, 2015). Foreign migration began to surge after, as these returnees and ethnic resettlers drove initial economic booms in the 1950s through 1960s, creating expansion in the labor market which could not be fulfilled domestically (Schneider & Engler, 2015). This prompted the establishment of treaties with other nations for the recruitment of “guest workers” to fill demand gaps. The first guest worker agreements began in 1955 with Italy, followed by Greece and Spain (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965) and finally, Yugoslavia (1968) (Schneider & Engler, 2015). Although never intended to be permanent or so vast in scale, these economic migration schemes were responsible for large population increases, and individuals from guest-worker countries comprised around 7.5% of residents in Germany by 1990 (Green, 2013). As examples of somewhat contradictory policies, the 1965 Act on Foreigners (*Ausländergesetz*, AuslG) did not heavily expand on guest worker policy and generally deferred to the Refugee Convention on matters of asylum; at the same time, it was premised on the notion that the “presence of the foreigner does not compromise the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany” (Section 2, para. 1), later upheld by the constitutional courts (Law Library of Congress, 2020). Guest worker recruitment was ended as an economic migration channel in 1973 as a protectionist measure responding to rising domestic unemployment rates (Green, 2013; Law Library of Congress, 2020), but many guest worker families had already been able to join them, and large numbers were able to apply for visas to stay, despite program termination agreements formally encouraging return to origin countries (Law Library of Congress, 2020). Additional legislation in 1983 again increased monetary incentives for former guest workers to return to their origin countries, but few repatriations came (voluntarily or not) in the immediately following years (Law Library of Congress, 2020).

Not until the late 1990s did Germany begin to prioritize a general acknowledgment of its migration-heavy demographic realities and policy-supported integration measures (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007; Green, 2013). Some degrees of loosening within non-refugee migration structures have since then provided types of (non-refugee) migrants somewhat clearer opportunities towards inclusion in German society. In part driven by the guest workers and their families remaining in Germany over time and across new generations (Law Library of Congress, 2020), German citizenship laws have become more applicable to long-term resident migrants, especially as they have opened doors to 18–23-year-old youths with a migrant parent who has been in Germany at least eight years (German Missions in the United States, 2021). Current government programs have been successful at increasing non-refugee migration for educational and employment purposes (BAMF, 2019, p. 2–3). Additionally, in March, 2020, more explicit accommodations were enacted for highly-skilled employment migration (Knight, 2019).²⁸ As of 2019, it is estimated that 25% (19.3 million) of Germany’s population has a “migration background” (see footnote 8), with around half of this group (9.8 million) possessing German citizenship (BAMF, 2019, p. 13; see also, Destatis, 2020b).

²⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning around the same time as the law’s inception, reduced migration possibilities through this channel during 2020, due to travel restrictions and government office closures (Bundesregierung, 2021).

At the same time, as some elements of non-refugee migration policy have liberalized, refugee policy specifically has done so far more slowly and contentiously. More exclusionary approaches were a dominant paradigm well into the 2000s. Immediately following the war, the German constitution (or Basic Law, *Grundgesetz*, GG) established a right to asylum and protection from political persecution. At its theoretical level, this provision emphasized the need for “universal civil and human rights in light of Nazi tyranny” (Poutrus, 2014, p. 117–118). At the same time, it was this “traumatic national past, which tabooed the questioning of the redemptive constitutional right of asylum” that did not allow for more productive debates around state-sanctioned notions of belonging that often promoted the exclusion of refugee outsiders (Joppke, 1999, p. 10). Sociopolitical processes attempting reconciliation have triggered ongoing controversies about whether refugee inclusion might threaten the very essence of “national self-image” (Alink, Boin, & T'Hart, 2011, p. 291).

When post-war asylum law was being formalized in 1953, it was based on the “highly restrictive” 1938, Nazi-era Police Decree on Foreigners (*Ausländerpolizeiverordnung*, AVPO) (Poutrus, 2014, p. 119). Due to definitional ambiguities in the Refugee Convention, other procedural restrictions and limitations on the scope of refugeehood were enacted. Further complexity in adjudication processes ensued in that claims to refugee status could be made on the basis of either the Refugee Convention or GG. But in either case, to be considered a refugee, one could not be “an enemy of the new constitutional [state] order” (Poutrus, 2014, p. 119). As noted previously, AuslG similarly placed emphasis on the fact that a refugee, to legally reside in Germany, had to be worthy of the state’s interest (Green, 2004, p. 35). Constructions of what constituted worth were driven by the state, but often ambiguously clarified and implemented, resulting in an ongoing “power relationship” between the state and the construction of the refugee, which would be “central to policy debates” in the following decades (Green, 2004, p. 35). The intensity of this power relationship surged, as increasing numbers of asylum seekers crossed the border in the late 1980s due to war and conflict in the Balkan states (Schneider & Engler, 2015). This prompted the introduction of more tenuous limited protection statuses that were not based on constitutional or convention definitions of what constituted a refugee (Ette, 2017). Adding to an already complex adjudication structure, these changes meant the exclusion of many asylum seekers from “secure refugee status” because their statuses were not based on notion of rights owed, but rather, were situationally dependent, unpredictable “acts of autonomous state sovereignty” that gave the state “a very high degree of discretionary power” over who might obtain very conditional protections (Ette, 2017, p. 98).

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, asylum applications to Germany peaked in 1992, with almost 440,000 applications filed, mainly from Romania and Yugoslavia (Schneider & Engler, 2015). Despite an acceptance rate of less than 5% at the time (Law Library of Congress, 2020), many Germans felt that asylum policy was abused and too liberal (Luft & Schimany, 2014). Racially motivated attacks against refugees also increased (Luft & Schimany, 2014), including the Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots in 1992. These riots were categorized as the most violent anti-refugee mobs in post-war history, as rioters (never eventually convicted of violent crime) threw Molotov cocktails and homemade bombs at a refugee shelter over three days, observed by thousands of onlookers (Kushner, 2017). As such, whether to abridge or eliminate the constitutional right to asylum became a highly charged political endeavor (Joppke, 1999). In 1993, the contentious Asylum Compromise (*Asylkompromiss*) ultimately preserved the constitutional right to asylum, but simultaneously curtailed the types of applications that could be made, created safe-country of origin concepts²⁹ practically de facto rejecting applications from certain countries, required valid travel documents for entry (usually without stops in any third country), lowered the quality of reception conditions and

²⁹ Safe countries of origin are defined as countries in which “on the basis of their laws, enforcement practices and general political conditions, it can be safely concluded that neither political persecution nor inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment exists” (GG, Section 16a.3). Into 2021, safe countries include the member states of the European Union, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Senegal and Serbia.

restricted access to the labor market and social services (Joppke, 1999; Law Library of Congress, 2020). These restrictions cut asylum flows by as much as 70% the following year (Joppke, 1999), such that there still existed a theoretical right to asylum, but no asylum seekers entitled to use it (Prantl, 1994, p. 96). This cemented a modern “dynamic of restrictionism” that afforded refugees only a minimum level of survival and deterred new asylum applicants (Ette, 2017, p. 102–103), well into the 1990s and 2000s (UNHCR, 2001).

More recent history in the 2000s has given way to liberalization in migration policy, as well as cultural shifts in the political and social perceptions of migration (Heckmann, 2016; Trauner & Turton, 2017). In 2000, labor shortages in the IT sector prompted the government to form an independent commission to investigate new migration policies as a solution (Laubenthal, 2018). The commission’s findings acknowledged the migration already occurring in Germany and proposed an improved framework of migration to address these labor-market shortages (BMI, 2001). The Migration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*, ZuWG) of 2005 was a turning point in migration policy history, as it represented the first time that permanent migration was explicitly presented and supported as a political aim (Trauner & Turton, 2017). The change introduced a new Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*, AufenthG), which simplified long-term permanent residency statuses, targeting skilled migrants in particular (Law Library of Congress, 2020). It also laid the foundations for the later, formally endorsed government concept of “support and challenge” (*Fördern und Fordern*) (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2006; Law Library of Congress, 2020), an approach to integration emphasizing its two-way nature between host and migrant. Finally, the act supported integration and language classes for migrants. Perhaps the biggest change, however, was the holistic shift caused in migration attitude and perception (Heckmann, 2016), as terms like “welcome culture” and “demographic change” became more prolific in political, media, business and common discourse (Laubenthal, 2018; Trauner & Turton, 2017). The sharp increases of terminology use “became instrumental to [...] enhance the acceptance of German society to being a country of immigration” (Trauner & Turton, 2017, p. 35).

Between 2005 and 2015, with respect to refugee policy however, vacillations between inclusion and exclusion continued. While ZuWG (Section 60) did expand definitions of persecution to include gender-related concerns and obliged refugees with a formal protection status to partake in integration courses (AufenthG, Section 25), asylum seekers and tolerated individuals did not experience greater ease in obtaining more stable residency permits (Gräßler, 2006). At the same time, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF) subsumed the concept of welcome culture, developing a government-endorsed definition and beginning to construct programs to support this aim (Trauner & Turton, 2017). A 2012 court case determined that all foreigners legally residing in Germany, including recognized refugees, subsidiary protection status holders and asylum seekers, had the right to a “dignified minimum existence” and that the provisioning for refugees could not be purposefully poor as to explicitly discourage new asylum applications (BVerfG, 2012, 1 BvL 10/10, Para. 3). The assimilation of various EU migration- (ex., Treaty of Lisbon, EU Blue Card Directive) and asylum-related directives during this time also helped converge Germany’s policy framework with those of other more inclusive EU countries (Ette, 2017, p. 19; see also, Green, 2013; Laubenthal, 2018).

Even so, these newly developing frameworks still emphasized order and regularity as priorities (Trauner & Turton, 2017), not necessarily acknowledging the realities of complex legal situations and forming implicit hierarchies of desirable versus undesirable refugees (Laubenthal, 2018). The safe-country list was expanded in 2014, as were residence rules and time periods for remaining in accommodation shelters. But, 2014 also brought reductions in waiting time for asylum seekers to access the labor market—from five years to three months—and time requirements to check jobs for qualified EU citizens were reduced to 15 months (Laubenthal, 2018). More directives were sent to states to drive various components of integration (Laubenthal, 2018), creating inequalities in what and how measures might be supported (Aumüller, 2018; Aumüller, Daphi, & Biesenkamp, 2015; Katz, Noring, & Garrelts, 2016). The Integration Act of 2016 (*Integrationsgesetz*, InteG) reduced labor market restrictions further, but has not yielded

corresponding employment rate increases (BAA, 2019a). Although more positive cultural shifts towards welcome have been clear, so too have volatile media discourses about how refugees are portrayed and dynamic public perceptions about how they ought to be perceived (Laubenthal, 2018; Vollmer & Karakayali, 2017), both of which have contributed to the rise of anti-immigrant and exclusionary nativist sentiments in social and political viewpoints (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019).

As a matter of general assessment, refugee- and non-refugee migrants have remained in Germany with varying degrees of inclusive and exclusive rights and statuses in the post-war years, with only recent shifts towards more inclusive attitudes, still not absent of conflict. The numbers of non-refugee migrants continue to grow, as do numbers of foreign individuals living with precarious legal statuses or even none at all (Bommes & Wilmes, 2007; Connor & Passel, 2019). But in the face of welcoming large numbers of refugees in 2015 in ways antithetical to decades of response, Germany has been left to contend with a contentious, but critical, question of sociopolitical national identity: it must decide definitively whether it is or is not a country of immigration that can positively subsume cultural and demographic differences into one enriched German society (Funk, 2016; Laubenthal, 2018). Understanding empowerment outcomes for the recently recognized refugees, current asylum seekers and those refugee migrants living with more tenuous subsidiary or toleration statuses may help assess the extent to which Germany is fulfilling its presumed commitments to moving in a more inclusive, migration-friendly sociopolitical direction.

3.2.2 The beginning of the long summer of migration, 2015 and beyond

2015 is generally regarded as a turning point in Germany’s recent refugee migration history. In large part due to conflict in Syria—displacing over 13 million people since 2012—as well as provisioning shortfalls for displaced populations in neighboring countries (Lehne et al., 2015; Ostrand, 2015), asylum claims in the EU saw unprecedented surges in 2015 and 2016 (EuroStat, 2020). Germany received the greatest number of first-time asylum applications within this time period, continuing in this position in subsequent years (EuroStat, 2020). First-time applications in Germany peaked in August 2016 (Figure 3).

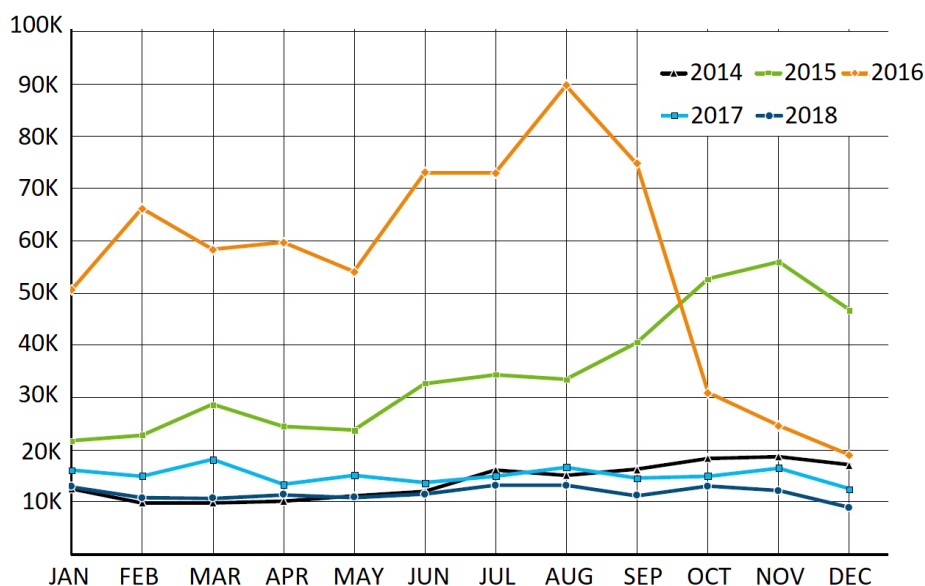


Figure 3. Monthly first-time asylum applications in Germany, 2014 – 2018 (BAMF, 2018a).

Figure 4 shows decision type by year. Origin country makeup has changed somewhat over time (Table 4). Flows from Albania and Kosovo slowed in 2016, likely due to their addition as safe countries of origin in November 2015; Serbia ceased to be a top-10 origin country by 2016. The top-eight protection-producing countries (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria) have been stable.

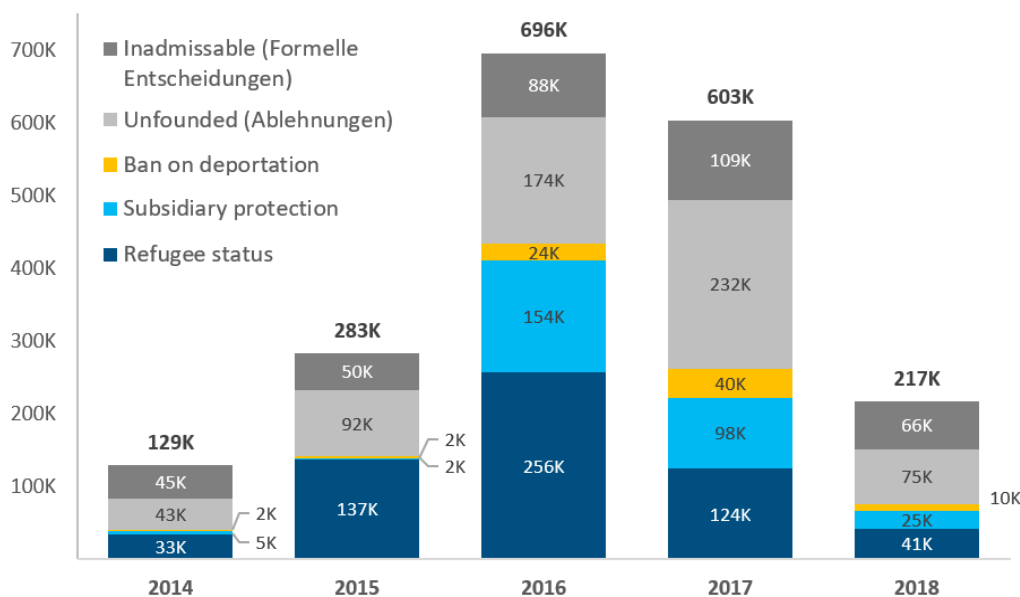


Figure 4. Number of asylum decisions by type in Germany, 2014 – 2018 (BAMF, 2018a)

Year	Country	2015		2016		2017		2018			
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		
2015	Syria	158,657	35.9%	2016	Syria	266,250	36.8%	2017	Syria	48,974	24.7%
	Albania	53,805	12.2%		Afghanistan	127,012	17.6%		Iraq	21,930	11.1%
	Kosovo	33,427	7.6%		Iraq	96,116	13.3%		Afghanistan	16,423	8.3%
	Afghanistan	31,382	7.1%		Iran	26,426	3.7%		Eritrea	10,226	5.2%
	Iraq	29,784	6.7%		Eritrea	18,854	2.6%		Iran	8,606	4.3%
	Serbia	16,700	3.8%		Albania	14,853	2.1%		Turkey	8,027	4.0%
	<i>Unknown</i>	11,721	2.7%		<i>Unknown</i>	14,695	2.0%		Nigeria	7,811	3.9%
	Eritrea	10,876	2.5%		Pakistan	14,484	2.0%		Somalia	6,836	3.4%
	Macedonia	9,083	2.1%		Nigeria	12,709	1.8%		Russia	4,884	2.5%
	Pakistan	8,199	1.9%		Russia	10,985	1.5%		<i>Unknown</i>	4,067	2.1%
	<i>Other</i>	78,265	17.7%		<i>Other</i>	120,886	16.7%		<i>Other</i>	60,531	30.5%
	TOTAL	441,899			TOTAL	723,270			TOTAL	198,315	
2017	2018	Syria	44,167	27.3%	Syria	44,167	27.3%				
		Iraq	16,333	10.1%	Iraq	16,333	10.1%				
		Iran	10,857	6.7%	Iran	10,857	6.7%				
		Nigeria	10,168	6.3%	Nigeria	10,168	6.3%				
		Turkey	10,160	6.3%	Turkey	10,160	6.3%				
		Afghanistan	9,942	6.1%	Afghanistan	9,942	6.1%				
		Eritrea	5,571	3.4%	Eritrea	5,571	3.4%				
		Somalia	5,073	3.1%	Somalia	5,073	3.1%				
		<i>Unknown</i>	4,220	2.6%	<i>Unknown</i>	4,220	2.6%				
		Russia	3,938	2.4%	Russia	3,938	2.4%				
		<i>Other</i>	41,502	25.6%	<i>Other</i>	41,502	25.6%				
		TOTAL	161,931		TOTAL	161,931					

Table 4. First-time asylum applicants from top-10 countries of origin in Germany, 2015 – 2018 (BAMF 2015, 2016b, 2017b, 2018a). Countries from the list of top-eight protection-status producing countries are bolded.

At an international level, Germany is party to the Refugee Convention, as well as the Common European Asylum System. While stemming from these frameworks, the German asylum-seeking process is federally governed by the National Asylum Procedure Act (*Asylverfahrensgesetz*, AsylVfG) and administered by BAMF at regionally based offices (BAMF, 2016c). It is distinct from programs of humanitarian

resettlement.³⁰ After the initial stage of personal data collection and identity verification, the adjudication process first involves an examination in accordance with the EU-based Dublin Procedure³¹ to confirm if an application should be processed elsewhere. If the claim is processed in Germany, the next steps are a personal interview, gathering of any additional information and finally a decision by BAMF, based on guidelines of the Asylum Act (*Asylgesetz, AsylG*). Within the advancement of the process, asylum seekers are redistributed³² across federal states according to a federal quota system (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*) as defined in AsylG, Section 45. This system disperses individuals by ethnicity to avoid the formation of so-called “parallel societies” (Drever & Hoffmeister, 2018, p. 428–429), but limits the organic formation of new ethnic or refugee migrant networks (Brücker, Jaschke, & Kosyakova, 2019). Some small ethnically concentrated enclaves have been created through the distribution of asylum applicants from countries with low numbers to areas where BAMF officials have expertise in processing such cases (Degler & Liebig, 2017).

To adjudicate asylum applications, BAMF may offer one of three types of positive decisions or two types of negative decisions.³³ Positive statuses may be full refugee protection (based on Refugee Convention or German constitutional standards); subsidiary protection (based on AsylVfG) or a ban on deportation (based on AufenthG) (BAMF, 2016c; Destatis, 2017a). An unfounded rejection means that an asylum seeker’s application is not judged to be acceptable based on positive evaluation criteria; the individual must leave or appeal within 30 days. When the rejection is manifestly unfounded, it means that an application is deliberately deceptive or highly unsubstantiated; the time frame to leave is 7 days for this outcome. An inadmissible rejection (also known as a formal decision) means that an application was declined to be processed due to administrative issue, for example, because of an already-filed application in another country. This requires a rejected applicant leave or appeal within 7 days. In the case of rejected decisions, local foreigners’ authorities can allow for a temporary suspension of deportation for a circumstantial period of time, a status known as *Duldung (Geduldete)*, or tolerated, based on AufenthG.

Each type of legal status, including toleration, ultimately affords different types of benefits and residency restrictions, with full refugee protection being the most generous (Appendices D and E). Briefly,³⁴ the Asylum Seekers’ Benefits Act (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz, AsylbLG*) regulates benefits for asylum seekers and rejected applicants. Asylum seekers are afforded monetary and material benefits to include food, housing, heating, clothing, emergency healthcare and hygiene articles, in addition to a small living stipend of “pocket money.” The exact composition and distribution manner vary depending on family status, accommodation type, personal assets and job status. Recognized refugees and subsidiary protection holders receive a larger amount of monetary benefit as regulated through social welfare schemes (primarily, unemployment provisioning per the Code of Social Law, *Sozialgesetzbuch II, SGB II*³⁵), although material benefits still remain dependent on shelter status. Access to legal benefits such as the right to work, family reunification, freedom of movement, education, government integration courses and vocational training programs similarly vary by stage within asylum processes, claim adjudication outcome and origin country.

³⁰ The asylum process is distinct from humanitarian resettlement, not covered within the scope of this work, as it has accounted for insignificant migration numbers (a few thousand per year) between 2015 and 2018 (UNHCR, 2018a).

³¹ The Dublin Procedure (EU Regulation 604/2013) determines which EU member state has jurisdiction over an asylum claim. It also checks for a previously submitted claim in another member state. If a state determines adjudication ought to be carried out elsewhere, it can file a transfer request, carried out within 6 months (12 months if the applicant is in a detention center and 18 if the applicant is untraceable). If a transfer is unsuccessful, the responsibility for adjudication stays with the original state requesting the transfer (BAMF, 2016c).

³² Chapter 7 explains the residential distribution process in greater detail, within the context of discussing domestic- and community-based empowerment. Figure 14 provides a schematic of the shelter distribution process.

³³ Chapter 5 explains the entirety of the asylum application process, as well as related statuses, in greater detail, within the context of discussing legal empowerment. Figures 11 and 12 provide schematics of the legal processes.

³⁴ Details on welfare schemes are provided in Chapter 6, discussed within the context of economic empowerment.

³⁵ The SGB is comprised of 12 different “books,” that outline the terms for specific fields of socioeconomic welfare assistance. Books are referred to using roman numerals (ex., SGB I, SGB II, etc.).

The sheer numbers of people, unexpected and quickly increasing, instigated an ongoing debate in public discourse about how to conceptualize the movement and provisioning of refugee migrants across all stages of arrival, adjudication and integration processes (Brücker, Kosyakova, & Vallizadeh, 2020; Vollmer & Karakayali, 2017). Prolific in common public discourse was the concept of a “refugee crisis” (*Flüchtlingskrise*), conjuring up notions of invaders overwhelming a complex and strained provisioning system (Georgi, 2019; Liebe, Meyerhoff, Kroesen, Chorus, & Glenk, 2018; Vollmer & Karakayali, 2017; Weber, 2016). Media, activist and even political challenges to this casting have not been absent (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; Laubenthal, 2018), especially when emphasizing the arrival of refugee migrants as an opportunity to bring social and economic benefit to Germany (European Commission, 2016a; Laubenthal, 2018). Scholars have also been rightfully reluctant to use such crisis terminology, in part due to lack of clarity to what or whom crisis refers (Karakayali, 2018). Some scholars, however, have argued that the term crisis might be applicable in so far as it refers to the abuses of human rights and outcomes of war that have encouraged displacement from sending countries (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017; Hess et al., 2017; Odutayo, 2016). Others point out that it might be relevant to describe the gross failures of a generally exclusionary and hegemonic European border regime, which has been unable to account for human-rights related migration needs and just migration policymaking (Guiraudon, 2017; Hatton, 2017; Lehne et al., 2015; Lehne, 2016; Trauner, 2016). Even so, a more productive proposition has suggested to position the migration movement of 2015 more accurately as a “long summer of migration,” referring less contentiously to population flows and movement which are commonplace occurrences (Hess et al., 2017, p. 6). Such positioning might also draw more attention to the organizational impact of refugee groups themselves setting into motion such perceived threats to long-standing political structures (Hess et al., 2017, p. 20).

Despite potential shifts in labeling, varieties of contentious public and political attitudes of exclusion versus welcome have continued to influence policy climates in Germany and the EU (Hess et al., 2017; Liebe et al., 2018; Trauner, 2016; Trines, 2019). It might be said that more political welcome positioning was prominent as the increases of asylum seekers were beginning. On August 21, 2015, an announcement from federal immigration authorities was likely leaked to media channels, putting forth Germany’s acceptance of yet-unregistered asylum seekers in external countries (Blume et al., 2016). Merkel’s (in?)famous declaration that “We can do it,” (*Wir schaffen das*) (Mushaben, 2017)—that is, take charge in the acceptance of large numbers of asylum seekers—occurred at a Berlin press conference on August 31, 2015 (Blume et al., 2016). As a result, many individuals were refusing asylum claim registration in neighboring countries, such as Hungary and Austria. Preferring to file claims in a more presumably optimal country, thousands of individuals found themselves stuck in crowded train stations with little resource to access asylum processing systems and wondering whether their journeys would end with arrest or deportation back to Greece or origin countries (Blume et al., 2016). Hungary specifically had suspended international rail travel to Western Europe in response. But by September 4, decisions had been made in Germany to legally open the border, permitting the waiting individuals to enter freely and apply for refugee status, overriding the EU Dublin III Agreement requiring them to apply for asylum in their first EU country of entry (Regulation EU No. 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council 2013; Funk, 2016). The policy encouraged inflows into Germany of upwards of 13,000 people per day (Blume et al., 2016). In the face of early criticisms coming from her own party, Chancellor Angela Merkel did not balk at embracing the challenge of such a decision, stating, “If we now have to start apologizing for showing a friendly face to emergency situations, then this is not my country” (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016, p. 14).

Additionally, the speed and number of arrivals inspired a swath of community-based activities supporting refugees provided through grassroots organizing as well as TSOs. This has been identified as an awakening of welcome culture, a (partially) empathetically inspired civic challenge to more exclusionary attitudes of the past and a possibility for more two-way collaboration between migrants and Germans in “a much-needed long-term shift in the dominant integration paradigm, which [has been] assimilationist in

orientation” (Braun, 2017, p. 40, citing Hamann & Karakayali, 2016). The prominence of these groups in providing critical physical, material, logistical and psychosocial support during the peak migration years has been so ubiquitous not only to cast it as its own phenomenon of study (see, for example, Aumüller, Daphi, & Biesenkamp, 2015; Bloch & Schuster, 2016; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Gesemann & Roth, 2018; Speth & Becker, 2016), but also as a population-wide “wave” that has “take[n] over many of the responsibilities [...] of public authorities overburdened by trying to fulfill [refugees’] basic needs” (Youkhana & Sutter, 2017, p. 2). As Aumüller et al. (2015) explains, “There is hardly a municipality that does not have any forms of [...] support and civil society engagement” (p. 73). Recent national survey data suggest that since 2015, almost 60% of Germans have participated in some type of refugee-related voluntary capacity, and as many as 20% remain actively engaged in organized assistance efforts (BMFSFJ, 2017).

Despite this initial optimism and open-door border policy of 2015 that contributed to the high numbers of asylum seekers, the government began to take measures to retreat from them almost immediately. First, the Dublin suspension lasted only weeks (Funk, 2016). As of 21 October 2015, Dublin III Regulation had been reinstated for everyone, including Syrians (Kalkmann, 2017). A few months later, by 2016, the government kept up its trend towards implementing more exclusionary measures (Trines, 2017). Prime Minister Merkel herself admitted a commitment to “measurably reduce” the number of incoming asylum seekers by February (Nienaber, 1 February, 2016, Para. 8). By March, Germany largely led the implementation of a potentially “morally problematic” EU-Turkey deal with increasingly oppressive President Erdogan (Funk, 2016, p. 290). The Turkish government would more stringently monitor Turkey’s coastline for refugee departures and admit rejected refugees from Greece, in exchange for billions of Euros worth of provisioning money for refugees in Turkey, as well as visa-free travel for Turks to the EU (Eralp, 2016). This curbed refugee migration inflows in 2016 (Funk, 2016), but also potentially contributed to more contentious attitudes towards refugees in all countries involved (i.e., Germany, Turkey, Greece, other EU nations obliged to resettle refugees) (Eralp, 2016). Additionally, in March 2016, an (ultimately failed) proposition attempted to add Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco as safe countries of origin, incidentally the origin countries of many presumed refugee instigators at infamous New Year’s Eve riots in Cologne in December, 2015 (Weber, 2016). Since these times, multiple legal changes of benefits provisioning schemes have vacillated between being more permissive, but also more restrictive (Kalkmann, 2017, 2019), such as the suspension of family reunification rights for subsidiary protection status holders from March 2016 to March 2018 (Grote, 2017) and the introduction of even more secure and regulated, detention-facility-like “arrival, decision and municipal distribution or return” (*Ankunft, Entscheidung und kommunale Verteilung bzw. Rückführung*, AnKER³⁶) centers in areas of Bavaria by August 2018, meant to house asylum seekers for the months-long duration of their application stays (Mouzourakis, Pollet, & Ott, 2019).

Ultimately, large numbers of migrants seeking refuge have turned to Germany to process asylum applications, provide welfare and act as a place to establish a new life. The volumes of incoming asylum seekers and growing number of recognized refugees, along with the resulting political responses, have generated real implications for all stakeholders at hand: for the individuals migrating, for German citizens, for broader German political and EU frameworks. As such, the migration events of 2015 are positioned as demographic, political and cultural turning points for Germany and Europe and thus demand detailed, nuanced understanding (see, for example, Fratzscher, 2018).

³⁶ AnKER centers will not be covered within the scope of this work, as their introduction was outside the fieldwork period. Additionally, by the end of 2019, only three states (Bavaria, Saxony and Saarland) participated in their use, NRW not included (Kalkmann, 2019).

3.2.2.1 Refugees in North Rhine Westphalia and the City of Cologne

North Rhine Westphalia³⁷ is the most populated of Germany's 16 federal states, with around 17.9 million residents (Destatis, 2020c). Its economy is robust with the highest state GDP (Destatis, 2020c). The state is comprised of 396 municipalities, divided into districts and sub-districts depending on size and administrative needs. Table 5 summarizes descriptive demographic and economic data about the city.

Population 1,089,984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals with migration background: 426,646 (39%) • Foreigners (non-German nationals): 212,191 (19.4%)
Average age 41.9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <18: 176,115 (16.2%) • 18–30: 183,723 (16.9%) • 30–65: 539,656 (49.5%) • 65+: 190,600 (17.4%)
Average household size 1.88 people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-person households: 285,362 • Households with children: 103,888 • Households of only seniors (>60): 131,404
City GDP	64.4 billion in 2017 (3% growth since 2015)
Employment sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service: 486,266 (85.5%) • Production: 82,369 (14.5%)
Incomes €1,780 per month (median) <60% median income (poverty/poverty risk): 23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <€900: 10.4% • €900–1500: 17.6% • €1500–2600: 29.9% • >€2600: 37.9%
Employment of residents	<p>Working age (15–64): 750,360 (68.8% total population)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreigners (18–65): 160,351 (75.5% foreign population) <p>Employed subject to social taxes: 415,919 (55.4% working-age)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident foreigners employed subject to social taxes: 79,630 (49.7% working-age foreigners) • Individuals from top-8 asylum producing countries employed subject to social taxes: 5,648 (3,970 in 2017) (Stadt Köln, 2019) <p>Minimally employed (<€450/month): 80,880</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15,871 minimally employed foreigners (BAA, 2019c)
Unemployment and welfare	<p>Formally registered unemployed, overall: 45,968 (4.2% total population)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreigners formally registered unemployed: 16,697 (36.3% of all unemployed) <p>114,497 (12.8% total population) qualify for benefits to cover subsistence costs according to SGB II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48,725 (26.2% of) foreigners qualify for benefits
Educational levels	<p>35% residents have a university degree</p> <p>7% have a technical school degree</p> <p>45% have a formally completed educational training (<i>Ausbildung</i>)</p> <p>13% have no post-secondary education</p>
Average residential rent (80m²) €8.60–11.20 / m ² /month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 district: >€13 • 2 districts: €12–13 • 2 districts: €11–12 • 2 districts: €10–11 • 1 district: <€10
Public finances	<p>Income: €4.4 billion</p> <p>Expenses: €4.5 billion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social welfare (<i>Sozialhilfe</i>): €1 billion (22% of expenses), highest expense category • €390 million (2017) and €403 million (2018) on SGB II

Table 5. Demographic and economic statistics about the city of Cologne. Information is current as of year-end 2018, unless noted. Data reproduced from Stadt Köln (2020a) unless a different source is designated.

³⁷ Data are current as of the time of fieldwork to present an accurate picture of conditions during the research.

The administrative district Cologne (*Regierungsbezirk Köln*) includes the city of Cologne and other smaller neighboring municipalities. This study focuses on the independent municipality, that is, the city of Cologne. Cologne is Germany’s fourth largest city (Stadt Köln, 2020a). It is divided into nine administrative districts and 86 sub-districts. Like NRW, the city of Cologne is similarly economically robust, with the 5th largest city GDP in the country (Statistisches Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2020). It is a young and diverse city, supporting a wide variety of industries and educational institutions, and positioned as a transit hub of Europe where 16 million people can be reached with just one hour of driving (IHK Köln, 2018).

As distribution to states is based in part on state GDP and population, NRW has received the greatest number of refugee migrants. The state received 16.2% (77,223) of all asylum seekers in 2015 (BAMF, 2015) and 27.2% (203,129) of all asylum seekers in 2016 (BAMF, 2016b). For similar reasons of economics and population distribution, as asylum seekers are further allocated to municipalities and local districts by state structures, the city of Cologne houses the highest number refugee migrants of any city in the state (Destatis, 2019). The total number of individuals seeking and living with protection and rejection statuses in the city of Cologne has been growing over time³⁸ (Table 6, Figure 5).

			RECOGNIZED STATUS			REJECTED		
	Total	Open cases	Total	Asylum protection status	Humanitarian resettlement	Follow-on permanent residency	Total	Tolerated
2014	15,655	1,955	11,945	2,525	2,025	7,305	1,960	1,755
2015	19,525	3,140	13,955	3,595	1,850	8,460	2,835	2,430
2016	28,485	8,250	16,630	5,770	1,820	8,965	4,295	3,605
2017	31,155	6,235	21,080	10,080	1,840	9,020	4,490	3,840
2018	33,150	6,075	22,970	12,250	1,765	8,840	5,195	4,105

Table 6. Total number of individuals seeking and living with protection and rejection statuses in the city of Cologne, 2014 – 2018. All numbers shown (current as of November 20, 2020) are reproduced from publicly available data at the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis) data generator site (<https://www-genesis.destatis.de/>).

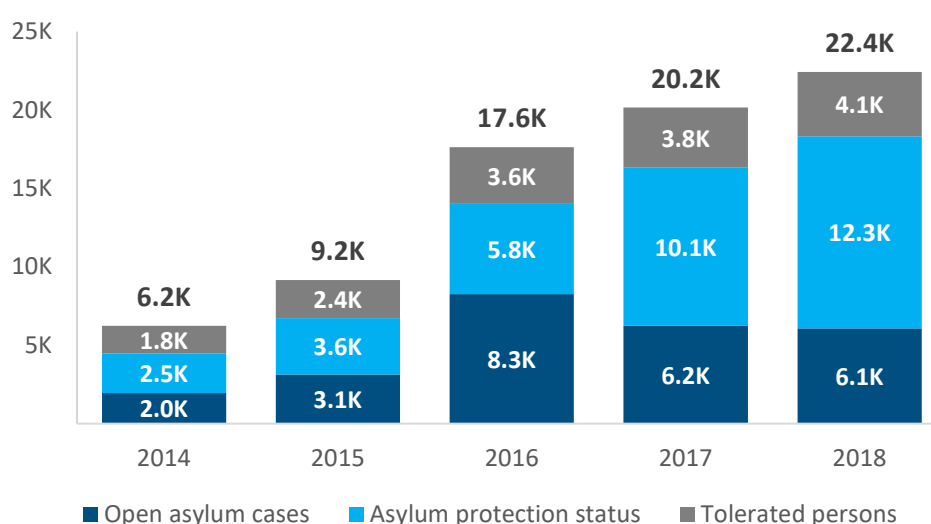


Figure 5. Number of individuals with open asylum cases, non-permanent residency protection statuses awarded through the asylum process and toleration status in the city of Cologne, 2014 – 2018. All numbers shown (current as of November 20, 2020) are reproduced from publicly available data at the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis) data generator site (<https://www-genesis.destatis.de/>).

³⁸ Note that these federally aggregated numbers are cumulative and do not break out first-time asylum applicants or recent refugee migrants from others who have been in country for longer periods time (i.e., arrival before 2014).

At the end of 2018, there were over 33,000 individuals with a protection-seeking migration background living in Cologne.³⁹ Municipal data also shows the number of decisions fluctuating similarly to national numbers, although acceptance rates have generally been higher in Cologne than nationally (Table 7). Origin countries are diverse, but do not vary widely from national compositions (Table 8).

	RECOGNIZED STATUS				REJECTED STATUS		
	Cologne Total	Cologne Count	Cologne Rate	National Rate	Cologne Count	Cologne Rate	National Rate
2015	1,887	1,122	59.5%	49.8%	765	40.5%	50.2%
2016	6,679	4,720	70.7%	62.4%	1,959	29.3%	37.6%
2017	4,581	2,537	55.4%	43.4%	2,044	44.6%	56.6%
2018	1,513	765	50.6%	35.0%	748	49.4%	65.0%

Table 7. BAMF decisions applied to asylum seekers in Cologne, 2015 – 2018, with local compared to national rates (Stadt Köln, 2018e; BAMF, 2018a)

	2015		2016		
Syria	1,505	15.7%	Iraq	3,775	20.6%
Iraq	1,415	14.7%	Syria	3,260	17.8%
Albania	1,095	11.4%	Afghanistan	1,790	9.8%
Serbia	885	9.2%	Albania	1,185	6.5%
Iran	805	8.4%	Iran	1,095	6.0%
Afghanistan	505	5.3%	Serbia	1,030	5.6%
Kosovo	475	4.9%	North Macedonia	585	3.2%
North Macedonia	400	4.2%	Eritrea	550	3.0%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	340	3.5%	Kosovo	525	2.9%
Eritrea	210	2.2%	Nigeria	400	2.2%
<i>Other</i>	1,965	20.5%	<i>Other</i>	4,160	22.7%
TOTAL	9,600		TOTAL	18,355	

	2017		2018		
Iraq	4,675	22.4%	Iraq	4,990	21.2%
Syria	3,975	19.1%	Syria	4,780	20.3%
Afghanistan	1,895	9.1%	Afghanistan	2,055	8.7%
Iran	1,415	6.8%	Iran	1,855	7.9%
Serbia	1,015	4.9%	Albania	1,060	4.5%
Albania	995	4.8%	Serbia	1,055	4.5%
North Macedonia	505	2.4%	Turkey	805	3.4%
Turkey	485	2.3%	North Macedonia	625	2.7%
Eritrea	485	2.3%	Eritrea	575	2.4%
<i>Other</i>	4,945	23.7%	<i>Other</i>	5,290	22.4%
TOTAL	20,855		TOTAL	23,580	

Table 8. Top-10 origin countries of individuals in Cologne living with open asylum cases, protection status or rejection status, 2015 – 2018. All numbers shown (current as of November 20, 2020) are reproduced from publicly available data at the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis) data generator site (<https://www-genesis.destatis.de/>). Countries from the list of top-eight protection-status producing countries are bolded.

³⁹ As previously noted, this figure is aggregated and does not refer only to individuals seeking protection after 2014. Similarly, this figure includes humanitarian resettlement recipients (distinct from standard asylum seekers), as well as individuals who have obtained permanent residency after specific legal requirements have been fulfilled.

As a city in which migration has been historically common (Orywal, 2007) and over 40% of residents have a migration background (Stadt Köln, 2020a), Cologne has aspired to greater refugee inclusion within policy frameworks. As early as 2004, it established a formal political refugee interest group—the Round Table for Refugee Issues (*Runder Tisch für Flüchtlingsfragen*)—whose first task called for improvements in shelter conditions (Stadt Köln, 2004). In 2011, the municipal government further codified its commitment to inclusion in its document, Concept to Strengthen the Integrative Urban Society (*Konzept zur Stärkung der Integrativen Stadtgesellschaft*). Here, the city cites its tolerance, cosmopolitan nature and diversity as key assets, underscoring long-term goals to enable equal participation for all migrants in economic, cultural and political areas of living (Stadt Köln, 2011, p. 1–4, 11). The concept calls on all departments of the municipal administration to work together with one another, along with civil society actors, to advance this aim, also mandating the consideration of refugees into general integration plans (Stadt Köln, 2011, p. 16, 49).

Specific commitments to both asylum seekers and recognized refugees in this plan were formulated even earlier in 2008 and 2009, through municipal working groups targeting the identification of refugee-specific challenges and possible solutions (Stadt Köln, 2010a). These early working groups recommended a focus on policy endeavors such as: clarification of legal status in a reasonable period of time, increased access to individual legal and psychological counseling, more municipal coordination points for information and services, more access to vocational training programs, earlier (federally supported) access to jobs, continued financial support for volunteer initiatives and consideration of special forms of housing for individuals in unique circumstances (Stadt Köln, 2010a, p. 85–150). Many of these recommendations were progressive beyond their time, as federal changes in some of these areas did not begin until well after 2015. More streamlined access to healthcare services was a specific area of progressive advancement, as NRW was the first state to introduce the possibility of an electronic insurance card for asylum seekers and recognized refugees late in 2015 (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018). Cologne adopted its use willingly and expeditiously by April 2016, an initiative the then-NRW health minister identified as a “win-win” situation streamlining costs for the city, but improving access to care (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2017a, para. 8).

As underscored in the city’s concept document, the role of TSOs is a prominent force in shaping and supporting these initiatives (Adam et al., 2019b). This is supported through Cologne’s long-standing history of civic engagement, as resident-provided, charitable activity has been an ongoing cultural norm (Stadt Köln, 2020b; Strachwitz, 2007). At the time of study, the city acted as an administrator for 25 municipal foundations working to advance social causes (Stadt Köln, 2020b), and with almost 400 civic foundations, Cologne has the highest number of foundations in NRW (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, 2019). With respect to advocacy for refugees in particular, history of involvement remains similarly prominent. Various organizations, for example, have been working since the early 2000s to advance the interests of particular migrant groups, notably Rom e.V. (advocating for the rights of many undocumented and tolerated Roma individuals from former Soviet republics) and Kölner Flüchtlingsrat, a refugee advocacy organization that has been quintessential in working with city administrators to define, refine and implement various municipal refugee policies in the recent past (Ottersbach & Pröhl, 2011). Large civic counter-movements against anti-migrant political activities and sentiments of the late 1990s and early 2000s have also been prominent and helped advance an improved culture of toleration, especially in the years past 2014 (Häusler, 2017).

At the same time, local administrators have not been immune from resource and execution challenges brought about during the influx years (Faigle, 2015). General municipal budgeting issues have not been absent (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018), but the situation has been exacerbated by inadequate state and federal reimbursements for specific measures of refugee provisioning, given the large numbers of people in such short periods of time (Janecek, 2017b; Stadt Köln, 2018c), as well as an extremely tight urban housing market limited by strict building and zoning codes (Adam et al., 2019b; Aumüller et al., 2015; Leßke, Singfield, & Blasius, 2019). As of the end of 2017, NRW estimated to provide benefits under AsylbLG to

around 82,000 individuals,⁴⁰ the majority of whom lived in shelter facilities of some type (Kalkmann, 2019). Similar to these state-level trends of dependency, slow trends towards refugees' greater independence have continued in Cologne (Figure 6), where the vast majority remain unemployed or welfare dependent. Just over 5,000 remain employed subject to social insurance taxes (Table 5). Shelter living⁴¹ remains a predominant living condition (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017; Stadt Köln, 2018d, 2018e), with estimates of over 10,000 individuals in shelters each year between 2016 and 2018 (Figure 7).

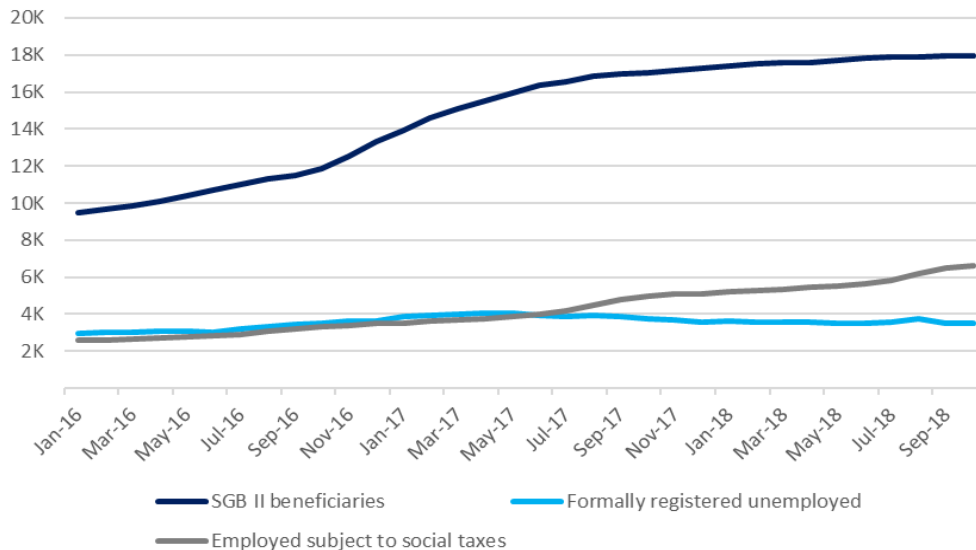


Figure 6. Individuals from top-eight protection-status countries (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria) who are SGB II beneficiaries, formally registered unemployed and employed in jobs subject to social taxes in the city of Cologne, January 2016 – September 2018 (BAA, 2019b, 2019c).

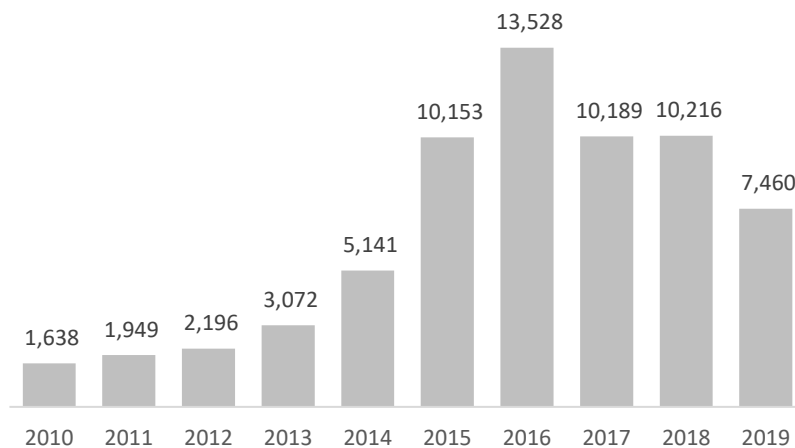


Figure 7. Number of refugees accounted for by the municipal Housing Office, 2010 – 2019. Figure derived from 2019 City of Cologne dynamic web data (<https://www.stadt-koeln.de/artikel/61297/index.html>). Per the website's definition, the counts include asylum seekers, tolerated persons, officially resettled persons and protection-status holders who cannot find private housing and are provided for by municipal shelter schemes.

In Cologne, asylum seekers are distributed across nine city districts. As of March 2018, towards the end of the research period, there were still around 90 refugee shelters across the city (Figure 8, Stadt Köln, 2018b), although shelters vary highly in their access to local resources such as transport connections, civic

⁴⁰ This refers to asylum seekers not yet receiving benefits under SGB II, as well as those with statuses.

⁴¹ Appendix F outlines the characteristics of the municipal shelter types based on the city's classification standards.

organizations, free-time activities, administrative and health services, grocery stores and the like (Adam et al., 2019b; Leitner, Mroß, & Schubert, 2016; Leßke et al., 2019; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). In practice, shelters house individuals at all stages of the refugee migration process, that is, asylum seekers, recognized refugees and rejected applicants either awaiting deportation or living with toleration statuses.

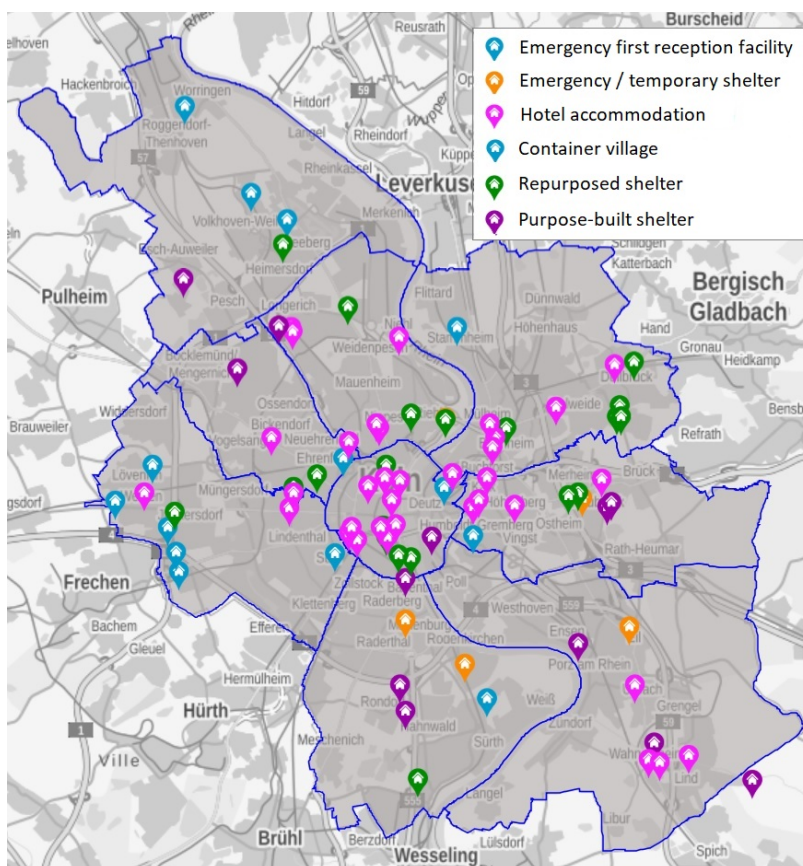


Figure 8. Distribution of shelter types across Cologne at the start of the fieldwork period. Map taken from City of Cologne web data, graphic accessed October 1, 2018 (Stadt Köln, 2018b).

Although the state government codified presumed minimum standards for shelter housing in 2016, building upon their endeavors in 2004, local standards during the influx years have not necessarily lived up to these commitments. At a minimum, shelters were to include: facilities for cooking or eating and laundry; bathrooms with lockable toilets; possibilities for separate spaces for individuals with special needs; areas for leisure activities and childcare; areas for counseling; and public transit accessibility (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015, p. 10; Stadt Köln, 2016). Cologne city administrators have expressed the theoretical desire to adhere to these standards when possible (Faigle, 2015), but have admitted difficulties in providing housing at these standards for high numbers of refugees (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). As the then- municipal head of social affairs (and eventual mayor) Henriette Reker explained, the minimum shelter standard “is actually a great piece of paper” (Faigle, 2015). Although the most provisional, low-quality emergency shelters fell out of use by mid-2017 (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2017b), a variety of shelter types (including non-permanent, modular ones) are continuously used as a matter of course (Adam et al., 2019b; Leitner et al., 2016; Stadt Köln, 2018d), and change to reverse course has been slower (Janecek, 2017a). This has been partly due to the city’s priority to avoid homelessness, as opposed to adhere rigorously to standards (Adam et al., 2019a; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017; Söhn et al., 2017). The actual status of housing, in terms of its qualities and features, has thus been actively and continuously criticized from various political and civil society angles as being neglected and frequently inadequate (Kölner Flüchtlingsrat, 2017, 2018; Leitner et al., 2016; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017).

The situational refugee climate in Cologne suggests an environment in which various factors influence outcomes of refugee living in conflicting ways. On the one hand, there is a presumed commitment towards integration and inclusion at the local governance level, as local structures attempt to use their budgets and offering constructions to include more asylum seekers and refugees in service offerings, where flexibility is permitted. At the same time, rates of welfare dependency and shelter accommodation still remain high, as do resource constraints and the level of support provided through TSO and charitable networks. These factors suggest that even Cologne's wider climate of inclusion may not be adequate to ensure substantially different outcomes than trends already being demonstrated throughout Germany, which the final section of this chapter explores. Ultimately, the study's analytical chapters draw from this baseline review to examine how these existing qualities manifest empirically in the local Cologne context.

3.2.3 Current assessments of agency-opportunity structure interactions in Germany

In a way, Angela Merkel's "We can do it" embodies the underlying inquiries of this study: what might be said about the German case so far as an experience of agent-structure interactions in the context of shaping outcomes of refugee living? This study aims to capture a view of these interactions and experiences in a local case situated at the micro-level of individuals to better understand their implications, along with how affected local actors might consider what has, in fact, been done so far and whether or not refugees might evaluate if such measures have helped them to achieve their goals in reestablishing life in Germany.

This inquiry must begin with a review of how other research positions and answers similar questions.⁴² What do recent assessments suggest about the condition of assets, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes in Germany, as they relate to refugees moving forward in rebuilding and shaping their lives? The vocabulary and concepts used to explore these conditions in Germany reveals a variety of terms used, such as self-reliance (Embricos, 2020), resilience (Dubus, 2017), self-worth (Wehrle, Klehe, Kira, & Zikic, 2018), life satisfaction (Walther, Fuchs, Schupp, & Scheve, 2020), well-being (El Houry, 2018; Scheu, Schmidtke, & Volkert, 2019; Schirovsky, Schmidtke, & Volkert, 2020) and societal participation (Christ; Scheu et al., 2019; Söhn et al., 2017). This labeling is often driven by the domain of focus—for example, whether evaluations are being investigated primarily from economic, political, social or psychological perspectives—but investigations share a broad goal to understand how refugees can participate in German society such that their lives might converge with those around them, driving mutually beneficial outcomes (Bonin, 2016).

The notion of integration (Brücker, Kunert et al., 2016; Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Bundesregierung, 2020a, 2020b; Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, 2019), however, is used most frequently used as a label or definition in examining these outcomes because it is a formalized directive of refugee governance across all institutional levels in Germany (Filsinger, 2019). It assesses the management of the asylum process with a focus on its follow-on conditions and outcomes of remaining (Esser, 2001). The concept of assessing integration—playing "catch up" in a way as policy directives acknowledge and react to steadily changing demographic and migration realities (Green, 2013, p. 336)—serves as the "normative reference point" (Söhn et al., 2017, p. 14) by which the government can assess the realization of opportunities of all individuals in German society, to include refugees, as a "basis for policy to strengthen social justice and improve social participation" (Bundesregierung, 2005, XV). Drawing from the UNHCR's definition of integration—"a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts" of refugees, host communities and public institutions (UNHCR, 2007, p. 1)—the German government officially sees integration as:

⁴² When possible, literature and data are confined to 2015 and later, to accurately capture the dynamics of the migration years that the study focuses on. Additionally, studies published during this time frame tend to use data gathered in the peak years and/or during the fieldwork time (2017–2018), meaning that conclusions are more relevant to the participants in this study, who migrated and lived within the German asylum system during the same time periods and under similar conditions.

[...] a long-term process. Its aim is to include all people who live permanently and legally in Germany in society. Immigrants should be able to participate fully and on an equal footing in all areas of society. As such, one is obliged to learn German, as well as to understand, respect and follow the constitution and laws (BAMF, 2020b, para. “Integration”).

Coexistence should be characterized by respect, mutual trust, a feeling of togetherness and shared responsibility. [...] Successful integration means [...] developing a common understanding of how to live together in society. As such, immigration is only able to succeed as a reciprocal process. It presupposes the willingness of the majority society to accept it, as well as the willingness of the immigrants to respect the rules of the receiving country and to strive for their own integration. [...] Integration requires commitment in almost all areas of life and from all levels of government. Many federal ministries, the federal states and above all the municipalities, but also many non-state actors, are involved (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2020, para. 1, 3).

Given the longevity of the process and its interconnected components across all levels of society, and origins starting within the asylum process itself, evaluating the nature of life improvement possibilities and outcomes by way of integration is fairly complex. In this way, integration is broadly similar to empowerment (as this study conceptualizes) in terms of having legal, economic, physiological and social dimensions related to improving participation in various areas of societal living (Esser, 2001; Johansson, Schiefer, & Andres, 2016; Kogan & Kalter, 2020; Schiefer, 2017b; Söhn et al., 2017). Current integration indicators and literature suggest that possibilities for refugee migrants to participate more equitably in these areas is broadly constrained, although asylum seekers and tolerated individuals experience more explicit constraints, which can have lasting deleterious effects especially if their claims are ultimately adjudicated positively. While existing research may frame conclusions with differing degrees of severity, urgency or optimism,⁴³ it nonetheless collectively points to a clear consensus that improved outcomes of refugee living in Germany need targeted interventions for holistic improvement across various agent- and structure-related categories (Trines, 2019).

From a quantitative perspective, integration measures used in official capacities show mixed trends with respect to life outcomes and choice application of refugee migrants,⁴⁴ emphasizing different measures of agency and governance functioning. Integration is frequently measured by indicators such as percentages of the refugee migrant population holding protection (as opposed to toleration) statuses, participating in areas of the labor market, participating in official government-sponsored integration programs, passing official language integration courses at the desired level of B1, living in private (non-shelter) residential facilities, obtaining certain educational or training degrees, achieving recognition of foreign qualification credentials and holding sociocultural or political attitudes similarly to Germans.

⁴³ How research frames the gravity of refugee integration from cost and population perspectives is an example of such a divergence. Brücker et al. (2020), for example, says that despite refugee influxes representing around 1.5% of Germany’s population, such numbers “hardly merited the moniker ‘refugee nation’” (p. 3). Trines (2019), however, casts the same figure as significant because it represents the “greatest population increase in several decades,” especially in some cities in which population growth is driven almost exclusively by non-Germans (para. 8).

⁴⁴ While measures generally attempt to focus on individuals with positively adjudicated claims, they are not necessarily consistently or neatly tracked across categories of legal status. As localities often have authority to grant exceptions to individuals with other statuses to work, attend language courses, move shelters and the like, it is not uncommon for such individuals to be counted inclusively within such metrics. Similarly, the segmented organization of various federal, state and local data systems, along with data protection laws, often precludes separate tracking of individuals by legal status. As these metrics are discussed here, *refugee migrant* continues to refer to all individuals migrating under asylum schemes, whereas designations about asylum seekers or other statuses are made when known. The federal IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey, for example, the most comprehensive, representative refugee migration survey research nationwide, tracks metrics for any individual who “came to Germany from January 1, 2013 up to and including December 31, 2016 and applied for asylum, regardless of the course and outcome of the asylum procedure” (Paiva Lareiro et al., 2020, p. 2). This survey and ongoing derivative publications refer to all such individuals as *refugees* (*Geflüchtete*).

Generally speaking, some of these indicators of agency and inclusive governance have moved in positive directions, albeit slowly. Since 2016, labor market participation is increasing for individuals with a protection status (BAA, 2018a), more are taking advantage of government job training opportunities (BAA, 2018a) and many employers do not indicate sociocultural issues with the work of refugee migrant hires (Degler & Liebig, 2017). Quantitative surveys show that refugee migrants' opinions on sociocultural issues such as voting, democracy or the role of women in society are converging with those of Germans (Brücker, Rother, Schupp et al., 2016; Schu, 2018). Individuals migrating as refugees, even since 2016, continue to feel broad feelings of welcome in Germany (Paiva Lareiro, Rother, & Siegert, 2020).

At the same time, other indicators trend in the opposite direction. In 2017 and 2018, rejection and toleration statuses were higher than in 2015 and 2016, and a lower percentage of decisions resulted in full legal refugee status during the same years (BAMF, 2018a). Around 95% of refugee migrant children attend schools (Paiva Lareiro, 2019), but many must attend remedial or below-grade classes (Trines, 2019). Refugee migrant youth from certain origin countries have lower likelihoods of completing secondary years of schooling (Paiva Lareiro, 2019). Attendance at institutes of higher learning remains low for adult refugee migrants (Trines, 2019). Although the number of refugee migrants living in shelter accommodation is slowly decreasing, it is still the predominant form of housing for the majority (as opposed to private or decentralized housing) (Kalkmann, 2019). Indicators of language acquisition are also mixed. Only around 15% of refugees who migrated between 2013 and 2016 have not participated in any integration course at all (Paiva Lareiro et al., 2020), but access to integration courses has been constrained to more limited groups via more restrictive laws as of summer 2019 (IQ Netzwerk Niedersachsen, 2019b). Although refugees of various demographic groups (including women with pre-school age children) generally self-report increasing knowledge with German the longer they have lived in Germany (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019), only around half of integration course participants reach the targeted language level (BAA, 2018a).

More holistically, many refugee migrants still feel impeded by legal uncertainty (Kosyakova & Brenzel, 2020) and lack of confidence about a secure future (Paiva Lareiro et al., 2020; Schiefer, 2017a). Aside from the length of time needed to adjudicate original claims and renew ongoing status, this relates to the fact that the majority of claim statuses result in temporary residency permits of some sort, when the majority of refugee migrant individuals would prefer to stay in Germany for the long-term (Paiva Lareiro et al., 2020). Further, refugee migrants collectively tend to rate their overall well-being and life satisfaction lower than those with no migration background (Brücker, Rother, Schupp et al., 2016). Other indicators of integration for those with a migration background also suggest less favorable outcomes for longer-term prognoses more generally, in that these groups have tended to have higher unemployment rates (up to twice as high) (Destatis, 2017b), lower educational qualifications and lower incomes than native Germans over time (Green, 2013, p. 344) and are thus more likely to currently be threatened by poverty (Destatis, 2017b; Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, 2019; Konferenz der Integration zuständigen Ministerinnen und Minister/ Senatorinnen und Senatoren der Länder, 2019). As of 2018, individuals with backgrounds from the primary asylum-producing countries remained minimally employed or employed subject to social taxes at a rate of only 24%, compared to a rate of 47% for all foreigners (Geis, 2018). Although employment rates for foreigners have remained stable since 2014, individuals from asylum-producing countries have shown employment rates as low as 10% during the influx years (Geis, 2018).

Large-scale mixed-methods studies supported through government or national foundation initiatives (Aumüller et al., 2015; Bendel, 2016; Brücker, Jaschke et al., 2019; Brücker, Kunert et al., 2016; Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2017; Johansson et al., 2016; Schammann & Kühn, 2017; Schiefer, 2017b; Schu, 2018) come to similarly mixed conclusions, namely that refugee migrants are a heterogeneous group of people with a variety of health, educational, social-psychological, legal and material needs that are being supported in some ways and hindered by others, with individual, civil society,

governance and public discourse issues being circumstantial drivers. No study reports a singularly positive or negative view of integration and chances and possibilities. From a qualitative perspective, no existing studies examine empowerment in the German refugee context exactly as this study conceptualizes, focusing on empowerment as a function of agent-structure related choices in shaping life outcomes. A small number, using integration concepts and vocabulary, assess various structural, social and individual barriers to applying capabilities towards building holistically better lives, especially as refugees themselves define them. These also come to similarly mixed conclusions about the possibilities of refugee living in Germany.

Söhn et al. (2017) comes close to conceptualizing the outcomes and drivers of refugee life similarly to this study. It is not an empirical study, however, but rather reviews literature on constraining and enabling factors of choice and capability application across areas of labor market participation and access to labor-related training, the schooling of youth, social help for youth, living conditions, civic engagement and cultural participation. Although the literature references outcomes primarily between 2012 and 2016, the review concludes that both individual and structural factors contribute to reduced capacities to fully participate in these various areas of living.

Similarly, Scheu et al. (2019), using Sen's capability approach, argues that successful outcomes of refugee life in Germany would mean that refugees have more opportunities and process freedoms to "lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value" (p. 4). Reaching this end is predicated on having agency in the form of meaningful employment, German language skills, family security, education possibilities, strong social networks and private housing. Unfortunately, findings suggest that while the rote capabilities to reach these ends often exist, functional barriers prevent their realization such that "beings and doings which [refugees] had achieved in their country of origin [...] are no longer possible in Germany" (Scheu et al., 2019, p. 17). That refugees "often do not reconsider what they do and are in Germany" implies that more easily attainable outcomes of living are not necessarily in line with refugees' own visions (Scheu et al., 2019, p. 17). This is consistent with Petzi (2018), finding that refugees have difficulty fully participating in society due to struggles internalizing new identities and accepting confining possibilities to shape them.

Schirovsky et al. (2020) approaches an evaluation of integration outcomes similarly, seeing the attainment of "dimensions of well-being" as indicators of a "good life," which also include social relationships, meaningful work, education opportunities, language knowledge and housing (p. 236). Obtaining these ends, however, requires actual "chances of realization," as opposed to the various types of individual and structural barriers refugees frequently face instead (Schirovsky et al., 2020, p. 238). Challenges can also compound on one another across various areas of living in cyclical manners; conversely, when certain barriers are eliminated in some areas, chances of realization are opened in others.

The idea that various barriers towards realizing ends of a self-envisioned better life compound on another is enforced in other studies on integration outcomes and life possibilities (Ohliger, Schweiger, & Veyhl, 2017; Söhn et al., 2017, p. 16). Gürer (2019), for example, finds that possibilities of integration and enhanced choices for life improvement occur across five channels, often related to legal stage or status (pre-arrival, first contact with government asylum systems, participation in official government integration programs, initial contact with community entry points and long-term stability-building activities), which build on one another. When breakdown occurs in one stage, it becomes difficult to progress optimally to the next. Similarly, Walther et al. (2020) conducts a representative survey of refugees arriving between 2013 and 2016 and finds that different living conditions associated with specific legal policies and stages of the asylum process have associations with overall decreased life satisfaction; specifically, enduring the lengthy, uncertain processing times of asylum adjudication, being separated from family and living in communal shelter facilities increase psychological distress, whereas being more positioned to procure employment, connections with German networks and language skills are related to reduced distress and ultimately drove higher life satisfaction.

El Khoury (2018) highlights this cyclical nature similarly, in findings that show that refugees are able to participate more in German society when they can enhance agency in the form of language knowledge, but also when they can improve poor mental health related to place of residence and difficulty with cultural adjustments, which can be helped by legal status. Unfortunately, as the majority of refugees continue to live in shelter facilities and not among other Germans, the development of social and linguistic capital is slowed regardless of legal status, and feelings of differences and slow identity convergence simultaneously persist. Wehrle et al. (2018) also confirm that an enhanced, holistic ability to return to and choose “savoring basic life freedoms” bolsters psychological agency in the form of supporting new identities, driving feelings of independence and rebuilding self-worth, which in turn contributes back to the ability to structure life in ways to savor freedom and choice (p. 10). But moving towards these ends is also predicated on establishing identities as providers or workers in novel settings to feel like there is more control over the future; capitalizing on these types of positional resources, however, is frequently hindered by the uncertainty of legal statuses and the asylum process in general (Petzi, 2018).

Overall, however measured, refugees as a migrant group experience holistic challenges in choosing how to shape their lives. Driving factors from an integration perspective can be grouped around individual (agency) factors, as well as opportunistic (structure) ones. As Brücker, Jaschke et al. (2019) summarize:

Resources and structural opportunities [...] must work together to facilitate structural and social integration. [...] In particular, the advanced German economy and its highly skilled labor force as well as the highly developed welfare state may create both resources for and impediments to structural integration and social inclusion (p. 27, 30).

Despite the importance of tracking integration indicators, this can risk denaturing the ideal of what integration ought to be—even according to the government, a two-way exchange between newcomer and host—and perpetuating the harmful reality that the measures of so-called success are prescribed solely by the very structures that make them difficult to reach in the first place (Ager & Strang, 2008). Castles et al. (2002) summarize this, pointing out that integration is often positioned as “a kind of medicine that newcomers should take in order to ‘fit in,’” rather than a process ensuring access to rights, services and society:

The way the verb can be used to suggest that people would ‘be integrated’ through various ‘integration programmes’ [can be] felt to undermine positive concepts of empowerment, choice, growth and development. [...] In the current EU context, [...] refugees are expected to conform and ‘integrate’ in a prescribed way [...] This creates problems for research about integration of refugees as well as for refugees who are not given a ‘voice’ in the process that determines their well-being and life chances (p. 124).

Indeed, a common criticism of the aforementioned integration-focused policy and research in the German context is that:

In particular, there is a lack of differentiated research that takes into account legal, structural, institutional and individual factors and relates them to one another with a view to refugees' opportunities to participate [in society]. [...] In view of the fact that the individual self-set goals in life are central to the assessment of participation opportunities, there appears a lack of knowledge about the subjective ones (Söhn et al., 2017, p. 48; see also, Gürer, 2019, p. 54; Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2017; Schirovsky et al., 2020, p. 243).

This criticism might help avoid emphasizing success metrics in seemingly one-way, productivity-related terms (Filsinger, 2018; Laubenthal, 2018). Such emphasis can obviously help address the individual and governance problems with long-term welfare dependency (Bonin, 2016; Funk, 2016, p. 292). Even so, simply having any job or earning income, however, cannot account for the more complex manifestations of refugees' growing existential needs such as considering work opportunities to be relevant, finding meaning in daily activities, building self-worth and having broader control over life trajectories (Wehrle et al. 2018).

In late 2016, as peak migration numbers were beginning to settle, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation composed a short policy note addressing this potential misplaced emphasis, arguing in favor of seeing empowerment as a deeper extension of integration and noting that asylum and integration policies can be evaluated as successful only when they are “empowering the refugees and strengthening their powers of self-organization” (Hunger, Koning, & Metzger, 2016, para. 8). Self-organization in this case did not merely refer to simply gathering in like-minded groups of individual refugees to promote collective action, but rather, to the more extensive application of expanding and applying choice within the asylum governance structure—for example, being able to choose to live with existing friends or family during the asylum process, being able to switch from an asylum migration channel to a work visa if a job were found, being able to more easily enter employment through the use of networks facilitated by already-working refugees, who could do so from the earliest times of their in-country arrivals. Empowerment, then, might be seen as fuel towards integration, in that refugee-driven choices could be viewed as the “self-determination” distinctly driving certain integration measures, such as obtaining language knowledge, participating in the labor market in meaningful ways and finding stable, private housing residence (Hunger et al., 2016, para. 2).

As a response, this study aims to address these potential shortcomings with the framework of empowerment as opposed to integration. An empowerment approach can deepen the understanding of life possibilities, regarding how individuals themselves choose to make specific life adjustments, how they shape and define the terms of their participation in social life and how they can apply their assets and capabilities within governance frameworks to execute their choices to reach these various integration “measures” of success. Given the taxonomy of choice (Chapter 2), its mere presence does not necessarily indicate empowerment to the fullest degree. After it exists at all, resources and structure must coalesce such that the choice is acted upon, and, more deeply, that it is acted upon to meet desired ends. Ultimately, a further review of the agent-structure component areas presents conditions suggesting that refugees may have difficulties in driving effecting choices in moving forward with the goals they seek. The remainder of this chapter presents these conditions more specifically, first reviewing additional literature examining the state of refugees’ individual assets and capabilities, and then the general legal opportunity structure of refugee in Germany, focusing particularly on the dimensions and qualities listed in the study’s framework (Figure 1).

3.2.3.1 Contributing elements of agency in recently arrived refugees

Refugee migrants in Germany are hardly a singular group of individuals who possess completely homogeneous qualities (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Ohliger et al., 2017). However, much literature discussing their diverse asset and capability sets often seeks to highlight them in the name of more relevant problem solving and policy interventions (Ohliger et al., 2017, p. 4–5). Additional empirical evidence concerning conditions of refugee living also highlights how general living conditions impact their diverse backgrounds and converge upon common points of potential agency enhancement or reduction.

From a sociodemographic perspective, refugee migrants carry with them a diverse set of human capital skills, assets and experiences they are hoping to apply in Germany. Recent representative demographic data has shown to counter more politically divisive narratives that refugees in Germany are uneducated or unskilled (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016). In fact, they demonstrate varying levels of education and professional experience. Survey results show that most are literate, with around 80% reporting a “good” or “very good” knowledge of both reading and writing in their native language (the top three being Arabic at 44%, Kurdish at 14% and Farsi/Dari at 10%). While 90% of respondents report no prior knowledge of German, 29% report a working knowledge of English. Only 9% attended no formal school, whereas 58% attended 10 or more years of school, in comparison to 88% of Germans. 19% of respondents had a university or technical-university degree. Interestingly, 37% of respondents had completed some form of post-secondary education, in comparison with only 29% of Germans. 73% of working-aged respondents (18–65) came with some work experience, averaging 6.4 years. Within this group, 30% reported positions as

laborers or workers, 25% as business employees, 13% as business employees in leadership positions and 27% as self-employed. 12% reported undergoing formal training or apprentice program with a business. Female refugee migrants, in general, seem to possess less formal education than men (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019; Lange & Pfeiffer, 2019). Male refugees, in aggregate, have reached higher levels of German language ability than female refugees with children, but the difference is less pronounced when compared to female refugees without children (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019; Paiva Lareiro et al., 2020).

These positive, diverse demographic characteristics can contribute to the likelihood that refugees as a migrant group would be able to begin to move forward rebuilding their lives in Germany (Hahn et al., 2019). Asylum seekers have generally skewed younger, and more have been male (Figure 9, Table 9). Being younger (and frequently single in the case of male refugees) offers more optimal positioning for longer time within the labor force (Brücker, Jaschke et al., 2019; Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Degler & Liebig, 2017).

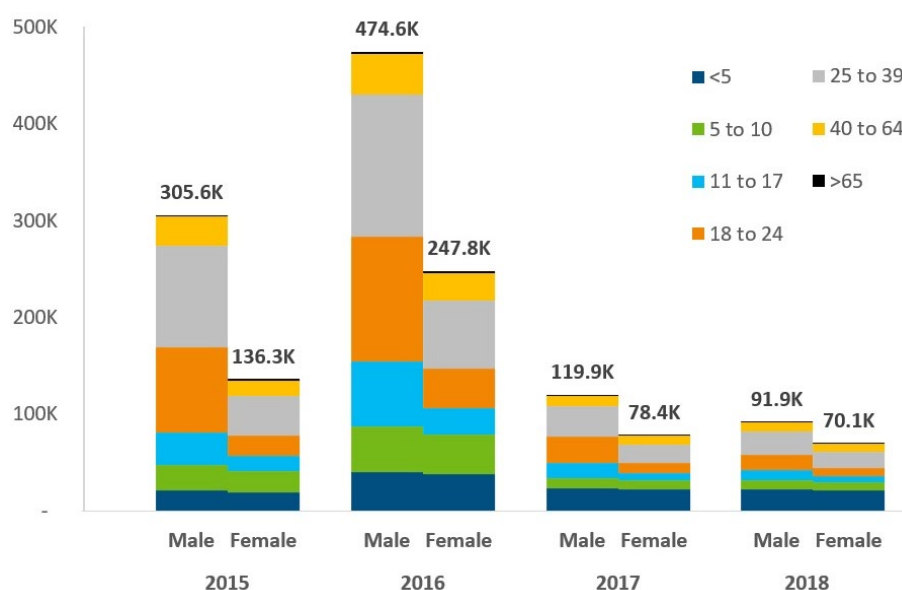


Figure 9. Numeric age distribution of asylum applicants in Germany by sex, along with rounded yearly totals by sex, 2015 – 2018 (BAMF 2015, 2016b, 2017b, 2018a).

	2015		2016		2017		2018	
Age	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<5	4.9%	4.5%	5.6%	5.2%	12.0%	11.2%	13.8%	13.0%
5 to 17	13.4%	8.4%	15.8%	9.6%	13.1%	8.6%	12.0%	9.4%
18 to 24	19.9%	4.9%	17.9%	5.6%	13.6%	5.2%	10.1%	5.1%
25 to 39	23.8%	9.1%	20.3%	9.7%	16.2%	9.7%	14.9%	10.6%
40 to 64	6.9%	3.7%	5.9%	3.9%	5.3%	4.3%	5.6%	4.8%
>65	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
TOTAL %	69.2%	30.8%	65.7%	34.3%	60.5%	39.5%	56.7%	43.3%
TOTAL #	305,584	136,315	474,566	247,804	119,904	78,413	91,854	70,077

Table 9. Percentage age distribution of asylum applicants in Germany by sex, along with rounded yearly totals by sex, 2015 – 2018 (BAMF 2015, 2016b, 2017b, 2018a).

As the number of school-age asylum seekers (<24) has generally been the majority (Table 9), many individuals are positioned age-wise to be partially educated within various levels of the German system and take advantage of employment measures targeting younger individuals (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Degler & Liebig, 2017; Grüttner, Berg, Schröder, & Otto, 2018). Refugee youth collectively, regardless of legal status, however, less frequently attend more advanced types of German secondary schools (*Gymnasium*,

Realschule) than those without a migration background (Paiva Lareiro, 2019). For adults, higher past education levels correlate with higher levels of German language acquisition (El Khoury, 2018; Hahn et al., 2019; Paiva Lareiro et al., 2020), and higher levels of German are associated with higher probability of employment (Kosyakova & Sirries, 2017). Higher levels of education are also associated with higher completion rates of language courses (Hahn et al., 2019; Tissot et al., 2019), which are in turn associated with higher employment probabilities (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019; Kosyakova & Sirries, 2017). At the same time, advanced education (tertiary degree) has no effect on employment probabilities (Kosyakova & Sirries, 2017) or may even decrease employment likelihood due to equivalency requirements (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019), although lower/upper secondary degrees and post-secondary degrees are associated with employment increases, when compared to refugees without formal schooling (Kosyakova & Sirries, 2017).

Additionally, some evidence suggests that refugee migrants often arrive with high psychological aspirations and motivations to move forward with life. Many refugees have educational and professional aspirations: 68 percent hope to complete vocational training or university studies (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019). Nearly 80% collectively report desiring to work, and around 97% of men report at least some desire to work (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016). Other survey shows that refugees—as they are willing to accept the risks of the perilous migration journey and unknown life abroad—may be more self-confident, extroverted and conscientious compared with the native-born or other types of migrant individuals (Brücker, Jaschke et al., 2019, p. 7–8). This helps support possible traits of resilience, self-efficacy and alertness that can increase refugees' potential career adaptability (Obschonka, Hahn, & Bajwa, 2018) and illustrate a type of predisposition towards flexibility in a new place (Hahn et al., 2019).

At the same time, despite the rich repository of personal experiences to apply in Germany, assets of physical health remain somewhat depressed across all stages of the asylum migration process. This is associated with prevalence of previous disease (Eiset & Wejse, 2017), the traumatic nature of the refugee migration process itself and conditions of living upon arrival (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019; Krämer & Schmidt, 2019; Laschet, 2016). Representative government survey data notes that 87% of refugees report fleeing from war, persecution or forced conscription, with over 50% having experienced shipwrecks, violence, sexual abuse, arbitrary imprisonment or other traumatic events during the migration process (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019). These trends are relevant even for individuals with a higher socioeconomic status before migration, suggesting that previous wealth or social positioning does not necessarily mitigate the stress of the journey or conditions upon arrival (Bauer, Brand, & Zeeb, 2020). Generally, refugees have worse conditions of overall health than native populations, although the differences may be greater for females or older individuals (Biddle et al., 2019; Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019). Unemployment or being single is also linked to lower mental and physical health statuses of refugees, and some health differences between refugees have been found based on origin countries⁴⁵ (Grochtdreis, König, Riedel-Heller, & Dams, 2020; Nesterko et al., 2020a). More generally, however, other representative survey data suggests that adult refugees frequently report suffering from long-term health limitations (16%), poor overall holistic health (19%), pain (25%) and chronic illness (40%) (Biddle et al., 2019). 30% of refugees report unmet needs for primary and specialist care, and general underutilization of services is clear when compared to native populations (Biddle et al., 2019). Underutilization of care contributes to worsening health conditions more broadly, as analysis of health systems data shows that both asylum seekers and recognized refugees show higher incidences of hospital and emergency department admissions, including admissions that could have been avoided through outpatient care or prevention measures, when compared to regularly insured individuals (Bauhoff & Göppfarth, 2018). Underutilization—and hence, related worsening conditions of health—has been driven through legal restrictions limiting healthcare access (Hyde, 2016), leading to

⁴⁵ Nesterko et al. (2020a) posits that origin country differences might be due to the diverse countries migrated from and thus the differing nature of transit journeys. Although not specific to Germany, Müller et al. (2018) reviews data on the prevalence of diseases and nutrition deficiencies commonly seen in refugee populations from specific countries.

inefficient, higher-cost care provisioning (Bozorgmehr & Razum, 2015). However, these restrictions have loosened in many municipalities over time through eliminating municipal pre-approvals for certain care and distributing electronic health insurance cards, driving utilization rates higher (Claassen & Jäger, 2018).

Depressed physical health is also related to the physical difficulties living within shelter environments, which remain the dominant form of accommodation regardless of legal status. Because the composition and provision of shelters varies widely (Aumüller et al., 2015; Schammann & Kühn, 2017; Wendel, 2014), it is difficult to assess the definitive number of recognized refugees, tolerated people and asylum seekers living in collective accommodation at a national level (AIDA, 2020). Some municipal governments have encouraged flexible interpretations of law to promote more housing in independent, private accommodations, whereas others have implemented far greater restrictions practically eliminating avenues to move from shelter spaces (El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Wendel, 2014). Some federal schemes that provide municipalities with housing funds to cover accommodation costs in collective centers have created incentives towards offering shelters as a dominant housing model (AIDA, 2020). National minimum standards for provisioning do not exist, and common conditions include lack of individual cooking facilities, shared toilets and wash facilities, open or communal sleeping areas and lack of private spaces (i.e., no walls or no solid floor-to-ceiling walls) (AIDA, 2017b; Kalkmann, 2017, 2019). Overcrowding remains a common condition, especially in the earliest years of influx, when municipalities were under-prepared to deal with large numbers of individuals in such a short period of time (Kalkmann, 2019).

Such conditions have been associated with a variety of health issues for shelter residents (Krämer & Schmidt, 2019). Between 2004 and 2014, infectious disease outbreaks in shelters (ex., chicken pox, measles, scabies, norovirus) increased annually (Kühne & Gilsdorf, 2016). In more recent years, small outbreaks of measles (Lampl et al., 2019), scabies (Mueller et al., 2019) and norovirus (Grote et al., 2017) have been reported, often difficult to contain due to varied practices of eating and hygiene that cannot be easily streamlined in these enclosed shelter and camp spaces (Grote et al., 2017). Although Belau (2019) finds no self-reported physical or mental health differences between individuals living in shelters or private homes in NRW, both categories are lower compared to native Germans. When reviewing actual hospital records of asylum seekers and refugees in other areas, however, Alberer, Wendeborn, Löscher and Seilmaier (2016) find high instances of headache, nerve pain, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression among shelter residents. In other cases of records analysis, high rates of nutrition issues, skin infections and psychological ailments are recorded (Oltrogge et al., 2020), as well as respiratory issues and infections (Goodman, Jensen, Galante, Farmer, & Taché, 2018). Other representative survey data (Walther et al., 2020) finds general associations between shelter living and lower indicators of physical and mental health. Federal survey data finds that those living in shelters are more dissatisfied with their living conditions than those in private homes, especially regarding quality of food, privacy and physical security (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016). Lack of physical security in terms of inter-personal conflict (i.e., violence, fighting) is common in NRW shelters (Christ, Meininghaus, & Röing, 2017). Lack of hygiene and food quality issues also cause some self-reported mental and nutrition-related stress in pregnant shelter residents (Gewalt, Berger, Szecsenyi, & Bozorgmehr, 2019). Often such conditions are difficult to avoid in practicality. Spatial arrangements of cities (ex., density, distribution of low-rent properties), along with broad housing market conditions, limit how municipal governments can build and allocate shelter, assist residents in moving to private homes and avoid potential concentration in less desirable areas, which can draw out the conditions of shelter living for long periods of time (Adam et al., 2019a; Aumüller et al., 2015; Aumüller, 2018; Friedrichs, Leßke, & Schwarzenberg, 2019; Noack, Rapsel, Weingarten, & Wohler, 2018; Schammann & Kühn, 2017).

Limited financial assets also remain a broad condition of refugees across legal categories, who are largely welfare dependent and have trouble establishing greater financial security⁴⁶. At the end of 2018, nearly 70% were eligible to receive some type of support under SGB II (BAA, 2019a). The primary source of long-term financial instability or low possibilities of financial asset accumulation largely stem from low employment rates. As of the end of 2018, the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BAA) estimated that only around 22% of refugees were employed in positions subject to social insurance taxes⁴⁷ (*sozialversicherungspflichtig Beschäftigte*) (BAA, 2019a). Other federal survey research data, which accounted for broader measures of employment (i.e., full-time, part-time, irregular, apprenticeships, self-employed), estimates total national refugee employment rates at only 21% for refugee migrants arriving in 2017 and 36% for those arriving in 2013 or 2014 (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019, p. 9). Although the number of refugee applicants for formal training programs increased in 2018 (to 38,300 from 26,400 in 2017), only around a third of these applicants managed to secure contracts (BiBB, 2019, p. 9). Despite around 30% of refugees reporting they were self-employed in their origin countries, only about 2% are estimated to be currently self-employed (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016, p. 49). Although refugee entrepreneurship is often politically touted as a channel to financial independence, it is uncommon in practice, largely due to various executional barriers and a lower entrepreneurship climate in Germany in general (Embircos, 2020).

Current slow changes to employment rates are consistent with past data showing that employment rates of those with a refugee migration background match those of native Germans only after more than 20 years of residence (Degler & Liebig, 2017, p. 25). Since the 1990s, refugee migrants have also taken longer than other types of migrants to enter work and have earned lower wages collectively (Brücker, Jaschke et al., 2019; Fendel & Kosyakova, 2017). Lengthy, uncertain asylum procedures are linked to decreased incentives to learn language, as well as related delayed entry into job markets (Kosyakova & Brenzel, 2020; Söhn, 2019). Additionally, the average monthly earnings of employed refugee migrants are measured around half those of all full-time employees in Germany, largely due to disproportionate involvement in low-skilled, low-paying work and high levels of underemployment (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019). Living within such states of financial precarity, coupled with low likelihood of swift entry into meaningful jobs, leaves many prone to “reactionary [...] poor economic decision-making,” further threatening stable, secure means to gather and save assets (Dhawan, 2018, p. 11). Additionally, specific financial burdens⁴⁸ related to refugee living, along with small welfare payments, predispose refugee migrants to living at financial margins (Dhawan, 2018).

⁴⁶ The numbers of asylum seekers, recognized refugees and tolerated persons employed or dependent on different welfare schemes is extremely difficult to measure. According to the BAA (see, for example, the various “*Migration und Arbeitsmarkt*” documents at <https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de>), only since 2016 has some national data been able to track employment and welfare rates based on legal status. Prior to this, a proxy measure was used. The proxy measure was based on the number of people from the top-eight asylum-producing countries (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria). Various government reports acknowledge that these numbers are likely over-estimations because not every migrant in Germany from one of these countries obligatorily has a refugee background. Depending on what is being measured, many federal, state and local sources continue to use this proxy to measure employment and welfare statistics in publicly available data. Therefore, such data tends to apply to refugees collectively as a general migrant group, as opposed to individual legal-status based sub-groups.

⁴⁷ This measure excludes the “minimally employed” (*geringfügig Beschäftigte*), working in so-called “mini-jobs” with temporary duration and/or a legally mandated earnings cap of €450.

⁴⁸ Across all stages of the asylum process, from journey through long-term residency, Dhawan (2018) identifies specific financial needs and pain points as: high costs for expenses such as transportation, cell phones and internet; high costs for translators and lawyers; difficulty understanding contracts and possibilities of being financially exploited as such; difficulty making large purchases such as computers, driver’s licenses and rental deposits; desire to support family abroad; need to repay loans from transit; and distrust of formal money management channels. Distrust and lack of use of these channels (such as banks or legitimate money transfer organizations) is often compounded by documentary requirements that make their use difficult in practicality (Wilson & Krystalli, 2017; Isaacs et al., 2018).

As in other international contexts, organizational and social capital seems most valuable when in the form of connections to specific types of third-sector or community intermediaries who may be better positioned to advocate, infiltrate or deviate on refugees' behalf. Although there is debate as to whether connections to intermediaries perpetuate exclusion through volunteer-controlled power dynamics and gatekeeping practices of deservedness (Braun, 2017; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Hess et al., 2017; Hinger, 2020; Stock, 2019; Vey, 2018a), interactions with and connections to civil society and third-sector actors still yield clear possibilities in moving forward across various dimensions of life. During the migration process, these connections filled critical material needs, in terms of supplying additional food, clothing, small household and hygiene items, information, internet cards and shelter along migration routes (Aumüller et al., 2015; Aumüller, 2018; Sutter, 2017, 2019), especially when the government lacked in this provisioning (Speth & Becker, 2016). But their power in recent years has been far more existential in terms of acting as explicit and "unique access points to German society" (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017, p. 23; see also, Dymarz M., Klinkenborg H., & Weber C., 2020; Jungk, 2016; Speth & Becker, 2016). This specific positioning of volunteers and TSOs has given them a de facto institutional and political nature (Schiffauer, 2019), as it is often these types of actors who serve as interlocutors between refugees during all stages of the asylum process and local administrations and politicians, welfare associations and the media, not only to drive "temporary relief from the often desolate life in the camps," but also to advance significant cultural or political change in conditions of refugee living (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017, p. 23; see also, Fontanari & Ambrosini, 2018). These findings are consistent with Gericke, Burmeister, Löwe, Deller, & Pundt (2018) and Bernhard (2021), whose investigations of broad refugee networks in Germany find that bridging ties to external groups (namely, social system contacts, social workers, volunteers, coworkers, supervisors, engaged community residents) are not only perceived as more valuable, but result in reaching more substantial life changes (see also, Dymarz et al., 2020). Bernhard (2021) underscores that the most valuable bridging connections "anchor" and tie refugees into institutional systems as opposed to merely expose them (p. 81). For this reason, these are ties that take extensive amounts of time and effort to cultivate, such that refugees experiencing linguistic, childcare, family or psychological burdens may not be able to do.

Access points have not merely included helping to improve attitudes of support and welcome within local German populations through advocacy and information (Aumüller et al., 2015; Daphi, 2016; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Speth & Becker, 2016). They are also often found to be "back door" channels to access language classes, jobs, legal advice, medical care, the housing market and other services, especially when legal structures severely restrict this access formally based on status or impede its reach logistically (Fontanari & Ambrosini, 2018, p. 595). These effects are very clearly demonstrated with respect to job and housing market entry specifically. Analysis of representative survey data finds that the majority (47%) of job opportunities for refugee migrants are found through social networks (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019); only 27% come through Job Center assistance and 9% through individual initiatives like applying online (see also, Kosyakova & Sirries, 2017). However, the nature of these networks matters; connections to other refugees only assist with job searching when they are employed (Stips & Kis-Katos, 2020), and jobs cultivated through non-refugee connections tend to lead to more meaningful employment, as opposed to low-skilled, low-paid menial jobs (Gericke et al., 2018).⁴⁹ This also relates to findings that show that personalized job searching and application support can improve the quality and relevancy of refugee jobs (Battisti, Giesing, & Laurentyeva, 2019), such that engaged, well-placed advocates may be in more relevant positions to help than other refugees or individuals who simply share the same ethnicity, legal status or migration background. More broadly, analysis of German views towards refugees shows that being younger, wealthier or more educated may increase tolerance and willingness to support refugees within a

⁴⁹ Haug (2003), in an analysis of valued human and social capital for migrants in Germany, points out that this makes logistical sense, in that since most employers in Germany are German, connections to Germans are more useful for job-networking purposes (p. 732).

neighborhood setting, suggesting connections to specific types of Germans others may be more useful (Friedrichs et al., 2019). This makes community connections and their demonstrated relationship to housing sensical. Connections to community members, engaged volunteers and local advocacy organizations have also been demonstrated to help refugees surpass barriers to finding private housing, such as language difficulties and landlords' unwillingness to rent to refugees, such that these volunteers engage on refugees' behalf (Adam et al., 2019c; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Hinger & Schäfer, 2019; Weidinger & Kordel, 2020).

Network connections to groups of other refugee migrants or individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds seem to be of less importance than connections to well-placed third-sector intermediary actors, especially given the vast ethnic diversity within refugee populations and dispersed nature of assignment to individual localities. Some small effects of refugee-based or ethnic networks are demonstrated in asylum application approval rates; slightly higher probabilities of application approval are seen in districts with larger ethnic network density and more contacts to them (Kosyakova & Brücker, 2020). But the possibility of obtaining a favorable protection status has generally been cited by refugee migrants as a more primary driver to pursue asylum applications in Germany as opposed to the presence of family or ethnic networks (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Tucker, 2018), although ethnic networks may act as a pull-factor for asylum seekers coming from so-called safe countries of origin (Guichard, 2020) and assist in spreading information about how to potentially file successful applications in the face of low probability outcomes (Kosyakova & Brücker, 2020). At the same time, internet connections to social media pages populated with both refugee and community voices provide access to information about legal cases, police activity and cultural events (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017). Although family and ethnic networks can situationally provide some degree of psychological support and possibly contribute to alleviation of some mental health conditions (Löbel, 2020; Renner et al., 2020), deep connections to well-positioned third-sector and community actors seem to have greater effects in assisting in driving substantial life change, especially given that so many highly controlled aspects of refugee living are "constantly under the work of production" of local administrators in charge of overseeing them, "being made and remade by a confluence of discourses and materials in interaction (Fontanari, 2015, p. 722; Eule, 2014).

Finally, the greatest synthesis of these combinations of assets and capabilities culminates in their influence on psychological assets, as literature clearly demonstrates adverse states of rote mental health and threatened aspirational capacities, as a result of enduring and experiencing conditions of refugee life across stages of the asylum process over time. Studies find conflicting conclusions on what sociodemographic characteristics might contribute to higher incidences of mental health issues (ex., male/female, single/partnered, higher/lower education, origin country) (Brücker, Croisier et al., 2019; Nesterko, Jäckle, Friedrich, Holzapfel, & Glaesmer, 2020b; Walther et al., 2020). But rote measures of decreased mental health are prominent when refugee migrants are evaluated holistically, especially when compared to non-refugee populations (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016). Representative survey data has shown almost 50% of refugees are affected by mild, moderate or severe levels of psychological distress, with around 11% of the refugee population screening positive for severe distress in need of urgent care (Walther et al., 2020). Other survey data reports around 46% of refugees with depressive symptoms and 45% with anxiety symptoms (Biddle et al., 2019), and around 75% of refugees describe having symptoms indicative of various mental disorders (Winkler, Brandl, Bretz, Heinz, & Schouler-Ocak, 2019). When compared to a healthy control group, refugee migrant children in Germany—especially those who have lived in shelter accommodations for long periods of time (Haase, Rohmann, & Hallmann, 2019)—are also found to have increased levels of anxiety, depression, attention problems, and withdrawal behavior that have implications of long-term adjustment and educational success (Buchmüller, Lembcke, Busch, Kumsta, & Leyendecker, 2018).

These mental conditions are found to be closely related to conditions of refugee living. Significant psychological correlations are found between insecure residency status and symptoms of depressed mental health (Johansson et al., 2016; Winkler et al., 2019), with those under threat of deportation facing higher

incidence rates than those with protection status (Walther et al., 2020). Those living in shelter facilities are at greater risk for psychological distress than those in private housing (Haase et al., 2019; Walther et al., 2020), particularly because they face frequent displays of violence (Christ et al., 2017), poor hygiene conditions, a lack of control over shopping and cooking decisions and limited capacity to accumulate household goods (Johansson et al., 2016). Lack of knowledge about the status of family members abroad, as well as legally enforced conditions of family separation, are shown to increase psychological distress (Haase et al., 2019; Johansson et al., 2016; Nesterko et al., 2020a; Walther et al., 2020). Similarly, lack of clear, explanatory information, opacity and (both refugee-perceived and bureaucrat-demonstrated) arbitrariness in asylum- and residency-related legal processes also contribute to psychological distress, unease and uncertainty (Eule, 2014; Fontanari, 2015).

Perhaps the most acute effect of these interacting factors is their cumulative influence on hope and aspirational capacity in the longer term, as conditions greatly curtail motivation to solve problems and make “a 'normal', integrated and also mentally healthy life” in Germany seem less likely (Johansson et al., 2016, p. 57). The longer refugees live in shelter accommodation, the more pessimistic they become about the trajectory of how their life is developing, especially as they feel they cannot adequately convey hope or adequate explanation to their children (Haase et al., 2019). Fontanari’s (2015) work, finds that when living experience is “characterized by [this] continuous waiting, uncertainty, precariousness, fear, inactivity and a temporal dimension reduced to the present,” the very notion of individual identity, “a subject's capability to perceive him- or herself as an autonomous individual, able to act and to give sense to his or her actions,” is severely threatened (p. 721). Even for those who receive a protection status, it is time-bound and must be continuously renewed, sometimes as frequently as yearly, amidst changing federal stipulations (Kalkmann, 2019). As such, Gürer (2019) and Grüttner et al. (2018) both find that living within such a continuing state of legal and residential uncertainty and possessing general lack of knowledge and information about education opportunities, support services, functioning processes of bureaucracy and strategies to obtain housing contribute to confusion about where to go to for help and perceived difficulty in solving common daily life problems. Such findings are quantitatively confirmed by Schirovsky et al. (2020, p. 302–303), reporting that over 40% of refugee migrants do not feel as if they “might achieve something with what [they] do,” and nearly 60% of refugees feel reduced confidence in finding solutions to problems. As optimism about coping with outcomes and lack of faith in problem solving capabilities are holistically reduced (Schirovsky et al., 2020, p. 308), psychological distress, regardless of cause, is linked to decreased participation in both psychological (ex., treatment, counseling) and social (ex., language, educational and leisure) mitigation activities (Walther et al., 2020; Winkler et al., 2019), fueling vicious cycles of further mental decline, worsening physical health, social isolation and difficulties progressing in daily life aspirations.

This overview of agency-related research suggests that in Germany, refugees’ material and immaterial resources at hand are not entirely deprived, especially with regards to past skills they might apply in their new host communities and often high levels of aspirational capacity upon arrival. Even so, refugees still experience other potential threats to their asset and capability repository, including depressed physical health, rudimentary living conditions, difficulty accessing employment and lack of information about their conditions that negatively influence psychological health and long-term outlooks on life.

3.2.3.2 Influences of executional and structural conditions in refugee legal schemes

Regarding the broad state and effects of opportunity structure bounding refugee governance in Germany, literature suggests that it is humanitarian in premise, but certain factors of organization and execution may position it to be constraining on choice execution in some ways.

Fundamentally, current legal opportunity structures stem from an evolved humanitarian premise that has changed considerably from the highly exclusionary policies of early post-war years (see Sections 3.2.1-2). New laws, at least in theory, seek to answer Germany’s “moral duty” towards refugees by

solidifying protection rights not only through the constitution, but through other laws and legal policies (Funk, 2016, p. 290; see also, Ilgit & Klotz, 2018). Frequent changes to federal legal texts; state-level decrees and clarifications; European, federal, state and county court decisions; and local and internal regulations and application processing guidelines contribute to situation-based discretion that local authorities have in implementing individual positive outcomes on case inquiries (Eule, 2014, p. 44, 54–6, 58). More broadly, the organization of federal welfare provisioning systems has also largely positioned municipalities to offer more inclusive avenues for refugees’ social, economic and political participation, if they remain political priorities for local administrations (Aumüller et al., 2015; Aumüller, 2018; Bommers, 2012; Hinger, 2020). These presumed commitments to humanitarianism have not been ignored by refugees, who generally consider Germany as a democratic nation that can afford new opportunities in principle. Since as early as 2014, refugee migrants have cited government commitments to observe human rights, promote freedom of religion, maintain political stability and provide medical care have as key reasons to settle in Germany (Worbs, Bund, & Boehm, 2014). Into the influx years, many refugees continued to remain broadly positive about respect for human rights in Germany—to include fundamental protections of equality, the ability to practice religion, the promotion of free speech and existence of freedom to live a protected life—especially in comparison to a lack of respect for these principles in host countries (Schirovsky et al., 2020, p. 230–231). As explained by Brücker, Kosyakova et al. (2020), “the processing of asylum applications and the overall provision of accommodations, safety-nets, and integration programs by German authorities have advanced the refugees’ integration process, although the initial shortcomings have been widespread” (p. 22).

At the same time, explicit inclusivity or permissiveness within legal structures has still been somewhat conflicted. On the one hand, Germany has reversed its previous self-definition as a nonimmigration country, expanding its support of migrants and acknowledging broad socioeconomic benefits of migration (Section 3.2.1). But between 2015 and 2018, other rapidly changing policies (Grote, 2018; Kalkmann, 2019) have made the rights of those migrating through asylum channels more expansive in some manners and more restrictive in others (Ilgit & Klotz). Stable protection statuses have been decreasing; between 2015 and 2018, just under half of asylum seekers received a form of protection (BAMF, 2018a). Waiting months or years in legal limbo for case adjudication and appeals remains a predominant experience (Table 10), despite some federal improvements in this regard (Brücker, Kosyakova et al., 2020).

	2016		2017		2018	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Afghanistan	8.7	18.2	11.9	12.9	11.3	20.9
Eritrea	10.7	13.8	8.3	10.8	6.7	11.5
Iran	12.3	–	10.3	12.0	6.8	16.1
Iraq	5.9	6.4	9.1	10.8	6.1	15.0
Nigeria	14.2	–	14.5	18.5	9.1	19.8
Pakistan	15.5	–	13.9	18.4	11.7	24.9
Somalia	17.3	–	13.5	17.7	10.0	16.2
Syria	3.8	3.8	7	9.1	5.0	14.6
ALL REPRESENTED COUNTRIES						
Overall processing	7.1	7.9	10.7	12.6	7.9	16.8
Application to hearing	6.1 (3.2 – 15.6)		7.8 (2.6 – 11)		2.5 (.7 – 4.7)	
Hearing to decision	2.8 (1.4 – 12)		4.0 (2.2 – 6.6)		3.9 (.5 – 5.7)	

Table 10. Average length (months) of processing time for initial asylum decisions and final decisions (after follow-on legal proceedings) (Bundesregierung, 2017, 2018, 2019). Table includes time for top-eight protection-status producing countries, as well as average (months) processing times from all international countries.

Often tied to specific legal statuses or localities, limitations in all areas of living—for example, the freedom of movement, labor market access, employment scheme eligibility, mandated language knowledge thresholds, skills equivalency requirements, the nature of social welfare distribution, the availability of shelter, the speed of application processing time, the suspension of family reunification—have led to conditions in which a primary certainty in all stages of refugee life is that of administrative uncertainty (Brücker, Kosyakova et al., 2020, p. 46–48; Hunger & Kersting, 2019; Schader, 2020). As state structures rigorously and quickly legislate and re-legislate these bounds of daily living, chances to move beyond them seem to be reduced to unpredictable “act[s] of mercy by the authorities,” as they have been historically (Green, 2004, p. 62). These structural uncertainties have demonstrated concrete effects on the lives of individual throughout all stages of the asylum process. Brücker, Hauptmann and Jaschke (2020), for example, show that residence obligations—becoming stricter in recent years for all legal sub-groups—hinders labor market integration. Surveys and interviews with refugees across legal categories also demonstrate that changing regulations, and the logistical disruptions that accompany them, prevent moving, ease of labor market access and bureaucratic difficulties engaging with job-facilitation programs (Schirovsky et al., 2020, p. 233–235). Similarly, these issues contribute to the majority of refugee migrants remaining dependent on government welfare provisioning for means of sustenance. Whereas 41.5% of foreigners in Germany are employed, less than 25% of refugee migrants meet the same criteria (BAA, 2019a).

More fundamentally, many challenging points stem from the overall complexity in policy execution, in terms of fragmentation of governance and the diffused location of responsibilities (Bogumil et al., 2018; Brücker, Kosyakova et al., 2020, p. 48; Schammann & Kühn, 2017). The overall political system of Germany is highly federalized (Zimmer et al., 2016). As in other governance arenas, subsidiarity in the refugee context relates to the nested regulations, multiple points of legal responsibility and layers of administrative complexity with regards to the nodes of the semi-sovereign government actors who advance these structures (Zimmer & Grabbe, 2020). BAMF as a federal office adjudicates asylum claims, but does so through regional offices. AsylbLG delegates many management and provisioning aspects explicitly to state and municipal governments with little standardized national oversight. This includes the distribution of welfare benefits, the provision of social and charitable services, the building and maintenance of public housing and the trajectory of managing rejected asylum cases (Kalkmann, 2019).

This structural design leads to positive and negative qualities impacting execution and outcomes. On the positive side, more local authority offers more presumed chances to demonstrate a variety of executional approaches that might be successful, especially when municipalities have provided more progressive or encompassing reforms than mandated by federal law (Aumüller et al., 2015; Filsinger, 2018; Nuissl, Domann, & Engel, 2019). As refugees as a migrant group are diverse with different backgrounds and legal statuses, the most successful support programs have been shown to be those locally tailored to fit these diverse needs (Schiefer, 2017b). As previously noted (Sections 3.2.2), nested, delegating structures have shifted a large amount of support away from government providers directly to local TSOs and voluntary groups (Hamann, Karakayali, Wallis, & Höfler, 2016; Speth & Becker, 2016), not only in the form of being key sources of significant amounts of material and psychosocial aid (Aumüller et al., 2015; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017), often driving “new ways [...] of negotiating belonging and civic participation” (Schiffauer, 2019, p. 289). The evolution of TSO involvement has grown so vast as to be seen as a new, culturally emergent “dispositif of helping,” as staggering numbers of Germans have coalesced and collectively internalized the desire to alleviate suffering through “legitimiz[ing] and guid[ing] concrete practices in support of refugees” (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017, p. 20; see also, Hamann et al., 2016; Karakayali & Kleist, 2015, 2016). This type of support, driven by local delegation, is a critical pillar for integrating refugees into local life (Gesemann & Roth, 2018; Hamann et al., 2016; Speth & Becker, 2016).

On the negative side, highly federalized structures have led to two primary challenges across the country, according to literature. First, local inconsistencies in terms of resource availability and legal administration processes have come to pass, contributing to broader instability in the policy environment. As they have been increasingly forced to enact widescale sociopolitical executional tasks, municipalities have “learned since the 1980s how to procure resources through third parties,” that is TSOs and contracting groups (Bommers, 2012, p. 108). However, this has created shortfalls in terms of inefficient cost management, as well as additional layers of bureaucracy, as TSOs act on behalf of municipal structures to create further layers of governance in execution (Bommers, 2012). In the recent refugee context, because TSOs and volunteers were essentially compelled to systematically take over many provisioning efforts (Vey, 2018b), this outcome is analyzed by various scholars as a failure of state welfare systems across governance levels to adequately provide justice for and take care of those whom they promised to protect (Pinl, 2015; Szukitsch & Merx, 2014; van Dyk & Misbach, 2016). Similarly, in a recent survey of involved volunteers, almost 75% felt that they and their organizations were taking on tasks that should be state responsibility (Dymarz M. et al., 2020). As benefits owed per law are denied, reduced or threatened by poor policy execution, these inadequacies in governance structures push refugees to rely often informally coordinated, outsourced support that can be highly dependent on locality (Aumüller et al., 2015; Aumüller, 2018), as well as rationed through exclusionary attitudes of volunteer-controlled, gatekeeping practices of deservedness (Braun, 2017; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Hess et al., 2017; Hinger, 2020; Stock, 2019). TSO resources are also not obligatorily bountiful (Ohliger et al., 2017). Local resource fluctuation has been found to affect integration in that limited resource and service availability even at the level of host neighborhood can contribute to refugees feeling negatively about integration prospects and measures, reducing their likelihood of more positive outcomes (Friedrichs et al., 2019; Seethaler-Wari, 2018). The availability of these TSO support resources in any municipality can vary readily, based on its history of migration within, past development of migrant communities, municipal financial health and infrastructure, as well as local attitudes towards migrants in general (Hunger & Kersting, 2019; see also, Nuisl et al., 2019)

The greatest demonstrated difficulty is procedural and executional inconsistency and opacity (Schammann, Bendel, Müller, Ziegler, & Wittchen, 2020). Because localities are given large degrees of discretion, and execution has been shared by so many actors, the nature of service delivery—be it material, psychosocial or even legal—has not been equal, creating unpredictability within overall policy structures (Bogumil et al., 2018; Schammann et al., 2020; Schammann & Kühn, 2017). In as much as delegation to local levels—along with the rampant policy changes in the form of aforementioned decrees, directives and state policies—can offer discretion in local contexts, they also create confusion and inconsistency in how they are administered (Eule, 2014; Fontanari, 2015; Schammann & Kühn, 2017). The work of administrative staff is often characterized by a high level of arbitrariness because they must make sense of constantly changing, sometimes conflicting legal information disseminated through federal and state channels but implemented within their local context (Schammann & Kühn, 2017). As such, individual local bureaucrats often become the ones constructing or advancing structural possibilities for moving on, through their own design of support offerings, approval or work permits or acceptance of tenuous residency statuses (Fontanari, 2015; Schammann & Kühn, 2017). This type of administrative inconsistency is also seen specifically within local policies towards toleration statuses. Municipalities have shown varying degrees of willingness to tolerate the tolerated (Eule, 2014), creating vast differences in how outcomes of how rejected asylum cases manifest locally and via different administrations (Aumüller et al., 2015). Such differences are supported by analyses of asylum decisions and locality, showing that regional offices of BAMF are at least somewhat influenced by the local environment in issuing decisions, creating differences in outcomes dependent on the office handling claims (Riedel & Schneider, 2017). This can also be supported by the vastly different rates of rejection and successful court appeals at the state level (Schneider, Segadlo, & Leue, 2020) (Table 11).

State	RATES		
	Rejection	Denied Lawsuits	Deportation
Baden-Württemberg	0.45	0.44	0.21
Bavaria	0.41	0.49	0.23
Berlin	0.46	0.20	0.19
Brandenburg	0.44	0.36	0.14
Bremen	0.34	0.29	0.06
Hamburg	0.38	0.19	0.21
Hesse	0.37	0.30	0.32
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	0.39	0.26	0.35
North Rhine Westphalia	0.42	0.42	0.20
Lower Saxony	0.37	0.42	0.15
Rhineland-Palatinate	0.39	0.46	0.15
Schleswig Holstein	0.38	0.53	0.21
Saarland	0.24	0.33	0.65
Saxony	0.44	0.41	0.32
Saxony-Anhalt	0.45	0.52	0.22
Thuringia	0.42	0.45	0.19
AVERAGE	0.40	0.38	0.24

Table 11. Average rejection rate, rejected complaints and deportation rate by German state, 2012–2017. The average values in the final row are not weighted according to the population size of the federal states. Table reproduced from Schneider, Segadlo and Leue (2020).

Second, delegation with more rigid federal bounds has created difficulty advancing society-wide change inspired by local solutions. With regards to issues of refugee governance, lower-level action has often failed to shape higher-level policy; in other words, while lower-level case studies of implementation have been successful in their local contexts, they have demonstrated less effectiveness in expanding their benefits upward to scale change (Bendel, Schammann, Heimann, & Stürner, 2019; Wendel, 2019). Although municipalities have “far-reaching decision-making competence,” they can only go so far as to work within more rigid federal bounds set broadly in systems of education, family and economic policy, which are more resistant to change (Bommes, 2012, p. 108; Schammann & Kühn, 2017). Difficulty instigating wider-scale change causes society-wide delays in integration and a general loss of trust among the refugee migrant population that change can be more deeply effective (Hesse, 2015; Thränhardt, 2019). This type of inconsistency has also largely shifted decision-making authority on asylum cases to courts⁵⁰ (Eule, 2014; Green, 2013; see also, Kalkmann, 2019, p. 20), increasing executional inefficiency and ambiguity within the overall asylum system. This contributes to refugees’ perceptions of unfairness or a lack of support, in that survey data shows that around half feel being treated fairly by the state is compromised to some degree, and nearly 70% perceive a lack of adequate government support to reach integration standards such as language knowledge levels or independent employment (Schirovsky et al., 2020, p. 233–235).

The current structural qualities and conditions of refugee governance suggest that in Germany, a revised humanitarian premise underlies changes in legal structures that are attempting to shift how refugees are supported in society. But federalized principles of organization simultaneously diffuse many responsibilities downward to local governments to enhance local flexibility, but without capacity to scale local changes more broadly. Similarly, such diffusion results in many local policy inconsistencies that contribute to a high level of structural uncertainty within the legal bounds that govern daily living.

⁵⁰ Kriesi (1995) describes this regarding general possibilities for sociopolitical change in Germany. German systems possess “formalistic inclusion,” meaning that access to formal means of challenge (i.e., courts) is clearer than less legalistic or informal means, which tend to be “met with strong repression” and few possibilities of concession (p. 87).

Summary

A review of literature from international contexts establishes key components of agency and governance opportunity structure that seem to enhance or constrain individual refugee actions towards empowerment. Summarizing the review of German literature within the context of key internationally based conclusions reveals areas of both conformity and disruption with respect to agency, opportunity structure and possible empowerment outcomes that will be explored further within the empirical chapters.

From the perspective of agency, literature suggests that Germany's refugee migrants possess varying levels of assets and capabilities, many of which are predictably affected by the experiences of refugee migration and living within the asylum system. International literature suggests that human capital and psychological assets often play a significant role in circumventing executional institutional barriers or capitalizing on breakdown points to drive life improvements. Trends in German literature show that German refugee migrants do arrive with reasonable levels of education, skills and workforce training they might theoretically apply within their new host country. Especially upon arrival, aspirations to move on, find work and begin adjustment are high for many. Even so, these individuals experience high levels of ongoing mental health issues, exacerbated the longer that rudimentary or uncertain conditions of refugee living persist.

At the same time, international literature also suggests that more cultural, linguistic and/or sociocultural homogeneity within a refugee group can predispose the formation of refugee-driven solutions within constrained settings. Germany's refugees are diverse in terms of origin countries, and shelters are not segregated by nationality, language, religion or even legal status, potentially reducing the power of this avenue of collective empowerment. Similarly, shelter accommodation is a long-term, dominant living condition in Germany for those across all legal sub-groups, a factor in international contexts inhibiting overcoming of structural impediments to move forward. Language learning and job-market entry are two specific areas that are especially delayed (in part due to shelter living), but higher levels of language knowledge, stable work and a non-subsistence income are important agency factors within the empowerment equation, in both international and German contexts. Limited financial assets can decrease purchasing power to procure other types, like the material asset of a home or the informational asset of a lawyer. Even so, basic, subsistence-level needs are adequately accounted for through welfare schemes, suggesting that there is some room for gathering and negotiating some types of asset accumulation.

Various legal institutional components shape these bounds of potential agency accumulation and application. In the international context, growing complexity in the administration of refugee governance and living spaces can create openings for potential bottom-up change—often when areas of administration are poorly functioning or drastically overlooked. Alternatively, third-sector interventions may have the potential to incorporate refugees into management structures, when they are particularly inclusive. In the German context, these types of structural entry points for refugee-driven change may be very situationally dependent. Local administrations manage and oversee most areas of refugee daily living, placing more flexibility for provisioning and inclusion with TSO groups as opposed to refugees themselves. At the same time, the nature of local bureaucracies, volunteer groups and sociopolitical climates can vary, influencing how much control over daily living there might be in specific circumstances of refugee living or shelters.

But the overall, highly federalized quality of the German refugee governance system, along with broad resource constraints caused by large influxes of refugees in a short period of time, have challenged provisioning schemes to provide accommodations and services of the highest caliber, while also perpetuating protracted states of legal complexity and uncertainty. From international contexts, opportunity structures that explicitly forbid (or make exceptionally difficult) specific applications of agency have clear influence on the possibilities of empowered life outcomes. Unrealistic possibilities for quick, transparent asylum case adjudication; difficult physical qualities of living; and highly bureaucratic conditions to move, enter education or work can drastically curtail the pursuit of basic or more meaningful life activities. These issues continue to be demonstrated in Germany, despite some positive legal reforms amid frequent legal

changes. These structural and provisioning shortfalls have increased the power of TSOs to not only provide services on the government's behalf, but intervene on refugees' behalf, frequently acting as interlocutors to bridge gaps between refugees and local governance actors with some power to possibly account for them.

As a case study city, Cologne possesses some specific qualities that literature suggests will be important within analysis. On the one hand, refugee composition is regulated through federal channels. Refugee migrants as a group in Cologne are not necessarily more or less predisposed to possessing certain human capital skills or psychological aspirations that would make them inherently different than other refugees in other areas of Germany, nor are they exempt from federally driven laws restricting certain possibilities for work or language learning. Similarly, Cologne, as a larger city, has an expansive local government with various departments and actors involved in highly regulating and administering refugee spaces. Strict building codes and zoning laws have created difficulties in quickly and efficiently building higher quality shelters, as well as a tight real estate market that makes affordable housing difficult to find for the population at large. As previously noted, complex, resource-constrained administrative systems are not unique to Cologne, and general urban problems of housing, childcare and job shortages are common for refugees living across Germany in similar settings. Employment and private housing rates for refugees in Cologne are lower, similar to national numbers.

At the same time, Cologne does possess a rich history of civic engagement and a host population highly predisposed towards providing assistance to refugees throughout all stages of the asylum process. As a city, the sociopolitical climate is fairly progressive, inclusive and supportive of diversity. Many initiatives to promote these values are encoded in official municipal government plans and programs, especially since high numbers of residents possess migration backgrounds themselves. Additionally, the local government indicates levels of awareness of various refugee-specific difficulties and attempts to be sympathetic to them, even if individual actors or leaders feel constrained in what they perceive they can do about them.

Together, the broader conditions of refugee life, along with specific local urban conditions in Cologne, suggest that neither elements of agency nor opportunity structure are wholly exclusionary, but imply potential difficulties in generating the most empowerment possibilities. Although the majority of German literature seems to focus on to what extent specific measures of integration are being met, as opposed to viewing these outcomes from an empowerment perspective, integration literature nonetheless reveals a variety of factors impeding or supporting meeting those benchmarks. Like the contributions to empowerment and choice, the factors are largely clustered around individual and structural components. On the agency side, more successful outcomes tend to be driven by having means of independent work, sustainable income, language knowledge, a private home and some type of entry into more established local social networks. On the structural side, successful outcomes tend to be supported most through efficiency in legal status processing, stability in legal status and inclusive legal permissions to build components of a better life, through channels such as labor market participation, education, training, family unification and permanent residency.

The study's analytical chapters draw from this baseline review to examine how these existing observations and qualities manifest empirically for individuals in the study context. Understanding the governance opportunity structure necessitates investigation at the macro level in the sense that federal policies define relevant elements of everyday living (like legal status and associated benefits). At the same time, local-level policy understanding, manifestation and execution are also critical, as German federal law assigns authority to municipalities in many areas of asylum policy execution and management. An understanding of agency emerges from the conditions at this local level, in order to better understand the structural influences on individuals' daily and immediate experiences (as opposed to merely examining policy or higher-level actors). Additionally, this approach shows areas in which choices may exist in legal structures but are not taken due to practical barriers in daily life or ineffectiveness in policy implementation.

In the empirical chapters that follow, I concentrate on how the lived experiences of the participants manifest within the dynamics of a local case, exploring the answers to the following types of questions that originate from the investigation of theory (Chapter 2) and literature (current chapter) presented thus far. Within situations of daily living in Cologne, what resources and capabilities (agency) do these specific refugees have, want and apply? What are their goals and preferences in this respect? What is the specific manifestation of (situationally exclusionary or permissive) legal opportunity structures in their daily political, economic and sociocultural living situations? How do these components work together to influence their choices moving forward (empowerment)? Are these individuals feeling like their choices advance them towards ends they seek? Why or why not? What strategies are more useful to help them reach those ends? Within these chapters, I anchor the analysis of findings back to the components discussed in the current and previous chapters, focusing on whether or not the participating individuals possess the types of agency necessary to combat the specific structural governance challenges at hand; the type of choice break down (presence, use or achievement) and the possible solutions or entry points to address these issues.

Ultimately, these findings, analysis and discussion presented within the empirical chapters demonstrate the primary contribution of this study, that is, the exploration of evidence within a modern German context to substantiate concepts from previous research on agency, opportunity structure and empowerment in refugee communities. This contextual investigation adds expanded dimensions to existing theories through a localized, in-depth investigation of daily refugee life in a developed nation.

4. Studying Everyday Refugee Life in Cologne: Research Design and Methods

The conceptual approach of Chapter 2 outlines that the possibilities for change in refugees' lives are tied primarily to the assets and capabilities they have at their disposal (agency); the institutional conditions that define their use (opportunity structure); and the ways these components interact to enable or constrain successful choices in building new lives (empowerment). The framework relating these interplays (Figure 1) acts as a lens through which to understand and describe the extent to which the participating refugees can execute choices within their everyday living situations in a local case in the developing German context. Chapter 3 discusses the empirical outcomes of these interplays in cases of refugee living, focusing on the extent to which refugees in Germany are broadly more or less predisposed towards these ends. Existing research at country and municipal levels suggests that in Germany, refugees' material and immaterial resources at hand are not entirely deprived, but that governmental opportunity structures remain closed to entry points for refugee-driven situational manipulation, as well as complex in their administration, potentially limiting empowerment for change. As such, the study's empirical chapters draw from this baseline review to examine how these existing conditions pertaining to Germany's refugee migrants overall manifest more specifically for the individual participants in the study's municipal context.

To this end, I pose the primary research question: to what extent are refugees empowered in their daily lives to improve and overcome legal, economic and sociocultural challenges that governmental institutional structures create? The central research question also includes the related sub-questions:

- 1) What is the current context of Germany's recent influx of refugee migration, beginning in 2015?
- 2) What is the nature of the legal governance structures and provisioning channels shaping the bounds of refugees' daily living experiences?
- 3) How do these structures influence refugees in defining, accumulating and using their assets and capabilities to address their needs and aspirations?
- 4) What specific actions and choices are refugees empowered to undertake (or not) in order to address the challenges and shortcomings associated with their status as refugees?

This chapter focuses on the methods undertaken to investigate these questions using a qualitative case study approach. This chapter begins by detailing the justification for this approach. The next section discusses data collection techniques to include explanations of languages used, field access, interview administration and sampling strategies. The following section outlines data analysis techniques and the development of the coding scheme rooted within the study's conceptual approach and grounded additionally within the data. The chapter concludes with an overview of ethical considerations unique to naturalistic research in a refugee setting.

4.1. Case study approach

A case study can be defined as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a 'real life' context" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). It is literally to be the study of a "case of something" (Thomas, 2011, p. 512). This research presents the study of a case of everyday life in refugee shelters in one district of Cologne, Germany. It draws on field research in this area conducted between May 2017 and May 2018, along with desk research focused on policy developments between Germany's refugee migration influxes in 2015 and the end of the fieldwork period.⁵¹

⁵¹ The European Parliament (2017) considers the starting point to be 2015, when "the arrival of over one million asylum seekers and migrants to Europe [...] exposed serious flaws in the EU's asylum system" (para. 2)

Figure 10 shows the case study typology of this research. I remain within a localized context focused on individual action to allow for a more intimate understanding of “the actors, the decision points they faced, the choices they made, the paths taken and shunned” (Bates, Greif, Levi, Rosenthal, & Weingast, 1998, p. 13–14). The purpose is instrumental and evaluative in nature,⁵² in that I use the case as an opportunity to evaluate the interplays of refugee agency and opportunity structure in a newly developing context with previous cases of refugee life and an established theoretical framework in mind. To this end, the aim of the case investigation is to explain a variety of possible empowerment outcomes through the application of existing conceptual relationships in the emerging German context.⁵³ I accomplish this by gathering qualitative data from a single case bounded by a snapshot in time.

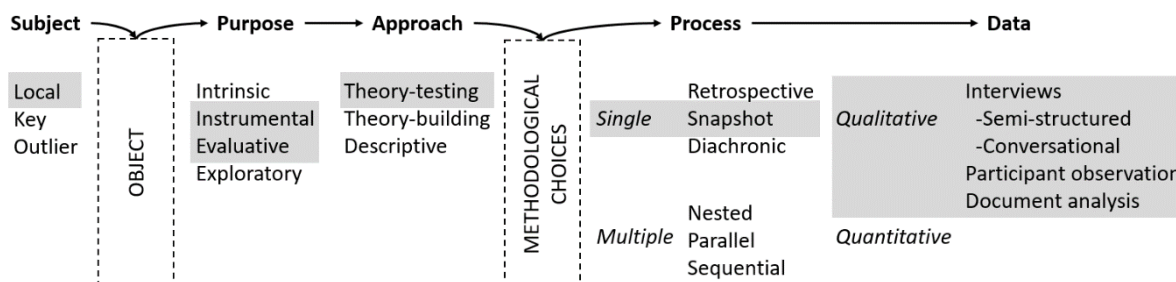


Figure 10. The typology of the case study (based on the heuristic adapted from Thomas 2011, p. 518 and shown with author selection of data types).

A qualitative, case study approach was both methodologically and logistically practical.⁵⁴ When there is little control over contextual variables (for example, political developments), and the research seeks to study interactions of actors and events in the context in which they occur (as opposed to explicitly divorcing them from their natural context), case study designs are ideal (Yin, 2003). Additionally, when individual agency itself is a focal point of study, an approach that centralizes the importance of local agents is necessary (Giddens, 1984, p. 328). Logistically, refugee populations are similar to other hidden populations of people in that they are often difficult to access and vulnerable to exploitation (van Liempt & Bilger, 2009), making experimental designs problematic to execute. In this context, local regulations prevented blanket access to shelter facilities. Privacy laws precluded access to census-like lists of refugees and their whereabouts. A qualitative approach with relevant purposeful sampling techniques was able to mitigate these issues, as suggested commonly across methodology literature (for example, see Creswell, 2009).

As other research on the daily lives of refugees in Germany continues to develop along with the political situation, case study research can help identify new variables for future study and refine theoretical concepts (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 20), even if the patterns and themes from the results are not generalizable in the statistical sense (Grandy, 2010). In this way, this study aims not to be a representative indicator of the generalized parameters of refugee life in all contexts, but rather, to apply the scope of existing theories in a specific type of institutional context to highlight situational influences contributing to positive and negative outcomes (Eckstein, 1975; George & Bennett, 2005, p. 75). From the German perspective, the insights from this work can identify possible entry points for mutually beneficial policy

⁵² To be instrumental in nature is to provide insight into a broader issue with the case being the support mechanism to do so (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). To be explanatory (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003) or evaluative (Thomas, 2011) in nature is to discuss operational links between interventions and specific types of outcomes (Yin, 2003, p. 6).

⁵³ Indeed, to test a theory does not necessarily mean to conduct an experiment with a predefined hypothesis, but rather, to discover tools or elements of explanation (Eckstein, 1975) and assess “the validity and scope conditions of single or competing theories” within a specific context (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 75).

⁵⁴ For an overview of criticisms of case study research, along with relevant rebuttals, see Flyvbjerg (2016), chapter 1 of George and Bennett (2005) or chapter 1 of Yin (2003). These defenses read very similarly to those of qualitative methods in general, for example, as discussed in Guba and Lincoln (1994) or Bryman (1984).

improvements. In what ways are the challenges of refugees' daily living material or legal in nature? What shortcomings are they able to successfully choose to address themselves? Where, from whom and how do they require the most assistance when they cannot? Perhaps more existentially, an understanding of possible shortcomings might also provide insight into the extent that new policies of refugee governance adhere to the philosophical ideals of the modern German political system, based on ideals of liberalism, freedom and inherent rights of the individual.⁵⁵

Ultimately, the case study approach allows for a multi-perspective localized investigation of an emerging phenomenon that will have a significant influence on the demographic and sociopolitical future of the EU and Germany (Lehne, 2016; Simonyi & Brattberg, 2015). Investigating this phenomenon through the application of an existing framework anchors it in the broader context of research on everyday refugee life.

4.2. Data collection

Because qualitative research uses "a set of interpretive activities" to connect parts to a whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9), it naturally lends itself to the use of multiple data types and gathering practices (Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 2). Such data triangulation increases the trustworthiness of data (Grandy, 2010, p. 474) and adds "rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth" to the research inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8). Gathered through a combination of field and desk research, three types of qualitative data are analyzed in this study: 1) documents (primary legal documents and secondary literature); 2) participant observation (field notes) and 3) interviews (semi-structured and conversational).

The research objectives and settings demanded that I approach the data collection deliberately and thoughtfully, but also flexibly. In line with the notion that "the choice of research practices depends on the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context," the developmental process of data gathering was thus "pragmatic, strategic and self-reflective" (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2). The following sections discuss these choices, practices and processes in greater detail.

4.2.1 Language modalities and use

In multi-language research, "language is central in all phases ranging from data collection to analysis and representation of the textual data in publications" (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010, p. 313); see also Temple & Young, 2004). Thus, it is necessary to outline the language and translation approaches used.

For this research, I worked within a variety of written and spoken language modalities: primarily English and German, supplemented with the support of English and German interpreters (into four additional languages) for a selection of interviews. English is my native language, but I consider German to be the second language I feel most competent in.⁵⁶ While my personal preference was to work in English when able, the necessity to communicate and obtain information effectively was the primary factor in my choice of language.

Cross-language research has the potential to create some meaning losses in the endeavor to translate and communicate the most authentic data (Squires, 2009). At the same time, I resolved to avoid methodological anxiety regarding this issue because I viewed cross-language operation simply as a structural necessity to progress with the research I wanted to do (Edwards, 1998, p. 198; see also, Murray & Wynne, 2001). Other existing qualitative research work in German refugee shelters has generally avoided the use of

⁵⁵ Section 2 of the GG states that "every person shall have the right to free development of his personality insofar as he does not violate the rights of others or offend against the constitutional order or the moral law."

⁵⁶ Between 2015 and 2016, I acquired a functional working proficiency of written and spoken German after attending 36 weeks of full-time German language training at the United States Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. According to the Interagency Language Roundtable scale, I reached levels of 3, 2 and 2+ across modalities of reading, listening and speaking, respectively.

cross-language ethnographic data gathering due to linguistic challenges.⁵⁷ I, on the other hand, was able to benefit from accepting these challenges simply as working conditions of the field space, additionally differentiating this work in the process. My data produced rich, naturalistic insights about daily life in shelters that I could present in English to make the dynamics of a local case more accessible to non-German audiences. Overall, my philosophy of language use was comprehension and ease of understanding as they applied to myself as the researcher, to those involved directly within my research and to those ultimately reading my research.

4.2.1.1 *Language at the desk*

I generally had more linguistic flexibility when conducting desk research than in the field. I reviewed literature and secondary source documents in both English and German. In searching and reviewing academic and gray literature, I began with English-language resources. In order to maintain accessibility to and comprehension of sources, I preferred to cite English sources when possible,⁵⁸ but included German ones as necessary. When reviewing media sources, I primarily used German media sources and news outlets local to Cologne to review for information specific to developments in the local study-site context. I consulted English and German media sources for broader information, such as reporting on policy developments at the level of Germany or the EU. When reviewing primary sources, I reviewed policy documents, legal texts and government statistics in either German or English as their provision dictated.⁵⁹

4.2.1.2 *Language in the field*

During fieldwork, I had somewhat less flexibility to choose my operating language. Deferring to language preference and ensuring comfort were applicable to interactions involving experts and native German speakers, with whom I always spoke German.⁶⁰ When speaking with shelter residents and other refugees, the issue of language was more difficult. Linguistic diversity in the Cologne shelters completely precluded the use of interpreters in daily field interactions. Most residents I worked with did not speak any English, nor I any languages they spoke. Similar to Bergman's (2010) ethnographic research in Swedish refugee shelters where interpreters were simply "not a choice" (p. 71), this left me with the need in our daily interactions to communicate together with refugees as second-language speakers of German. Occasionally, we could also communicate verbally using text or voice recording through Google Translate on our mobile phones. Nonetheless, like Bergman (2010), I acknowledge that the varying German language abilities of

⁵⁷ For example, Florian's (2017) more conventional ethnography was one of the experiences of German-speaking volunteers in shelters, not refugees. Dittmer and Lorenz (2016) used no participant observation and relied exclusively on translated, scheduled interviews. Witteborn (2011) and Dilger and Dohrn (2016) used some observation and informal conversations as data, but acknowledged that translated, scheduled interviews were the focus. Christ et al. (2017) used a multi-lingual research team in their on-site visits to refugee shelters, where they conducted spontaneous interviews and transect walks, but they similarly did not rely on embedded stretches of time observing life in shelters.

⁵⁸ International organizations such as the UNHCR and the OECD published many situation briefs, literature reviews and policy development resources in English pertaining specifically to various aspects of refugee migration in Germany. Other national German organizations and research groups such as the German Red Cross, Caritas and the Cologne Institute of Economic Research published overviews in German on topics as such as local policy developments, national legislation changes and the state of civil society engagement.

⁵⁹ The city government of Cologne published all municipal policy documents and statistics only in German. Some national legal texts were available in English, in which case, I worked with the official English translations provided by the Federal Ministry of Justice (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, BMJV) and referenced the original German as needed. When only German text was available, I used translation tools and information from secondary literature to assist in comprehension. For national statistics, I referenced official data from BAMF primarily in German. Other national German and EU data were available in English via official statistical reports of Eurostat.

⁶⁰ I was upfront in my introductions to note I was a second-language speaker of German, but not a single native-German speaking shelter employee with English knowledge chose to speak English with me. We conducted all personal and research business in German. One security guard, who was himself a second-language speaker of German, was the only shelter employee who occasionally spoke English with me.

participants may have reduced the amount of detail that could be conveyed in everyday conversations. At the same time, body language, emotive displays (like crying), gesturing, drawing and photo sharing were non-linguistic ways in which the gravity of meaning was often underscored when exact words were unknown. I frequently documented these non-linguistic elements within my field notes.

Further, as I spent time in the field, I became accustomed to the refugee participants' altered and simplified ways of speaking. In the Swedish context, Bergman (2010) called such modified ways of speaking and understanding "asylum-Swedish," that is, the use of simplified language structures and non-linguistic gestures to "seek a common way of creating meaning using the Swedish language as a base" (p. 71). I also observed such communicative streamlining in German shelters. Agreeing with Bergman's (2010) conclusions, I found observing and using "asylum-German" to be an integral part of understanding the struggles to communicate, which I may not have been privy to had I relied on interpreters. To experience talking with others in the ways they had to in order to conduct daily business helped observe the role language played in affecting people's empowerment to make decisions, accomplish tasks and overcome feelings of isolation.

When I did record notes in the field, I would take hand-written notes in a mixture of primarily English with some German, but I would immediately transcribe full notes in English when I left the field for the day. To ensure accuracy, I always asked for clarifications if I did not understand something. Such repetitions were advantageous because they helped participants to enforce salient points of interest with additional specificity.

4.2.1.3 Translation of data

Working between languages eventually necessitated a consolidation and translation of data into a single working language. Within this work, translation has involved secondary source documents, recollections of experiences, field notes, hand-written transcriptions of semi-structured and conversational interviews and professionally typed transcriptions of audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews.⁶¹

Because translation is an active process of social, communicative mediation (Sokolovsky, 2010), researchers must always be conscious of potential meaning associated with moving between language modalities (Gawlewicz, 2016, p. 38). At the same time, even if translations by their nature lack a perfect one-to-one technical correspondence to the source, they can nonetheless be based on holistic meaning (Kapborg & Bertero, 2002) and strive for maximum completeness in meaning (Sokolovsky, 2010). In this way, my goal as a researcher-translator was to work to convey fullness in meaning with the ultimate communicative goal of understandability in English.

In order to fulfill this goal and reduce complications as much as possible, in line with Strauss (1987) and Flick (2009, p. 300), I did "as much and only as exactly as is required by the research." I worked as much as needed in what languages were required by the situation, using translation tools to assist when necessary. Overall, like Halai (2007, p. 350), I aimed to convey my data textually "in a way that it was easy to write, easy to read, easy to learn, and easy to search" (p. 350). The goal in conveying utterances was to emphasize the "[importance of] capturing the meaning and approximate wording of remarks" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 66).

⁶¹ I used a selection of tools to assist in translation when needed. As dictionary and grammatical resources, I primarily used Leo, Linguee and Collins bilingual German-English dictionaries available online. I also consulted the Collins German Unabridged Dictionary, 7th Edition as a desk reference. To check for comprehension and create basic starting points to write my own translations, I used a combination of Google Translate online and Systran 8 Translator Professional desktop software as needed. For assistance with more difficult or nuanced German passages for translation, I consulted academic native speakers of German with near-native proficiency in English.

4.2.1.4 Translation in interviews

Especially when recalling or experiencing situations of mental stress, multi-lingual individuals often feel happier, more confident and more intelligent when speaking their native language (Kline, Acosta, Austin, & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, in as much as the interview situation allowed, I tried to let participants drive the language spoken. I offered participants the ability to speak in English, German or a language of their choosing via an interpreter.

All experts chose to interview in German. All but one permitted recording. Because I am not a native speaker of German, I used a German transcription service (*MeinTranskript.de*) to produce accurate transcriptions that emphasized readable content.⁶² I only translated quotations used within the manuscript.

For semi-structured interviews with refugee families, all non-English speaking refugees wished to speak via interpreter. I viewed interpreters not as a “necessary evil,” but rather, a type of key informant (Edwards, 1998, p. 199) who would help me bridge cultural and linguistic gaps to respectfully communicate (Berman & Tyyskä, 2011). There were variations in terms of interpreter skill, but it was a cost to accept given that finding qualified interpreters was difficult overall.⁶³ I followed the same procedures with interpreters before and after interviews.⁶⁴ I provided the interview guide (in German or English) in advance and scheduled time to discuss interview procedures. After interviews, I debriefed with necessary questions or clarifications. In the manner of engaging them as research partners, I also asked them to share their perceptions regarding if I had sensitively conducted the interviews and how participants seemed to feel.

I avoided recording interviews with refugees out of concerns for their privacy and comfort. I wrote full transcriptions of English and German interview notes in English within 24 hours of the interview (and when able, immediately after leaving the field). When quoting my transcriptions, I have translated any grammatically incorrect German into grammatically and contextually correct English for readability purposes, but attempted to preserve the simplicity of utterances via word choice and sentence structure. I quote refugees from the viewpoint of the first-person, as the interpreters communicated to me.⁶⁵

Ultimately, I took a balanced approach to interpretation and translation, aiming for understandability. If subtle nuances have been lost in these processes, I have considered them a transaction cost in bridging formidable communicative barriers to illuminate potentially hidden experiences.

4.2.2 Document collection

The inclusion of legal texts, policy documents and other documentary sources (such as statistical information) was a necessary component of analyzing the bounds of governmental opportunity structure (Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006, p. 14). Including information from these documents helped to understand the legal or codified basis for what types of choices and potential outcomes existed in specific contexts. Their discussion is a key analytical component of the empirical chapters.

⁶² An explanation of the transcription standards, based on Dresing and Pehl (2011), can be found in German at the Mein Transkript website (<http://meintranskript.de/einfache-regeln/>).

⁶³ Unfortunately, the lack of trained, qualified interpreters (speaking languages like Sorani, Kurmanji, Urdu, Dari, Farsi, Igbo, Wolof and dialectical Arabic, along with natively proficient German) is a common problem that persists throughout Germany within the overall asylum claims process (Greulich, 2018). Whether or not we translated into English or German depended completely on interpreter availability. Because of these availability difficulties, I sought interpreters through a combination of volunteer, TSO, university, personal and professional sources.

⁶⁴ I worked with four interpreters for interviews. The Kurmanji interpreter was a Red Cross volunteer who lived in Germany about 10 years and spoke functional (non-native) German. The Albanian interpreter was a Master’s student from the University of Bonn who spoke near-native English and functional (non-native) German. The Sorani interpreter was paid through an interpreter company, but not formally trained, although she spoke natively proficient German (having immigrated as a young child). The Farsi-Dari translator lived in Germany nearly 30 years and spoke near-native German. She was a formally trained interpreter who worked in various professional interpreter contexts.

⁶⁵ The interpreters would report speech using a format of, “(S)he says...” then proceed with using the first-person voice.

In the German case, the governmental opportunity structure is defined through a nested institutional system of “cooperative federalism” that disperses central power to the states, while ceding some national power to the EU (Joppke, 1999, p. 68). Thus, I reference documents from governing bodies at multiple levels to include the EU, German national government, state of NRW and municipality of Cologne. Additionally, the execution of refugee policy on the local level has been further decentralized to national aid organizations and civil society groups. Therefore, I also discuss how these organizations act within the institutional context as an extension of governance to further shape the bounds of daily living.

The use of documentary sources supports an understanding of governmental institutional structures and their relationship to refugees’ daily living conditions⁶⁶. Because nongovernmental institutions were not the primary focus of the study,⁶⁷ I discuss rather qualities of implementation within the context of governmental institutional structures, as the examples of complexity in policy execution that contribute to empowerment outcomes in various ways. In these instances, I rely on data from interviews and field observation because these institutions are “created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” and presumably unwritten (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727).

4.2.3 Participant observation

Recording immersion experiences from the field in systematic ways is an essential component of naturalistic research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 14; Flick, 2009, p. 416) to make sense of how and why people do certain things in a particular institutional context (Neuman, 2007, p. 276). In total, I wrote 52 field note entries to comprise over 200 typed single-spaced spaces. I also made field note entries for 10 educational or civil society events I attended to total 34 typed single-spaced pages.

Emerson et al. (1995) describes two basic approaches to documenting observations in the field. In the first, the primary goal is purposeful insertion into an event ordered explicitly towards producing notes. This was my role when participating in lectures, educational or civic engagement events in which the purpose was to attend and listen to the message being given. Here, I documented notes as they happened.

In the second approach, the goal is instead maximal immersion in the daily rhythms of others’ lives in order to “experience fully another way of life and its concerns” with less focus on producing written records as the events are unfolding (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 17). This was how I viewed my time in refugee shelters. I aimed to be unobtrusive during my interactions so that I could listen to and see life without distraction. I wanted also to be attentive to residents’ needs and fully present in their stories to better develop notions of comfort, trust and positive rapport. To be a vigilant observer meant that I was always watching and listening because “everything that occurs in the field is a potentially important source of data” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 61). Nothing to me was off limits to document. Along with my “own feelings, opinions and working hypotheses” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 61), I documented notes from all my activities and conversations as a participant observer in refugee shelters and volunteer events. These factors together generally precluded direct note taking in these field settings. To avoid loss of detail (Murchison, 2010, p. 71), I typed complete field note entries either on the day of observation or as soon as possible thereafter.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) that review the use of legal documents and indicators across relevant empowerment literature. See also Bowen (2009) for a brief discussion on how document analysis involves “finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesizing” data to contribute to building concepts and themes (p. 28).

⁶⁷ In part, this is due to what results were grounded in the data: refugee shelters did not possess the necessary conditions for self-organized informal rule systems to develop among residents (Chapter 7). Additionally, the study’s vantage point was that of refugees, not of government agents (for example, as in Eule, 2014) or civil society groups (for example as in, Simsa, 2017 or the contributions in Youkhana and Sutter, 2017), although I circumstantially discuss in the empirical chapters how these types of actors are often the ones predisposed to operate “outside the law” as street-level bureaucrats via informal, unwritten organizational practices.

4.2.3.1 Field access

Between May 2017 and May 2018, I conducted fieldwork at four primary shelter sites in one municipal district of Cologne. The majority of my work was concentrated at two shelters. Appendix C provides an overview of the shelters in which I conducted ongoing observational work.⁶⁸

To achieve the access, trust and normalcy necessary for observations in settings where vulnerability and imbalanced power dynamics are particularly acute, researchers must often seek out a “membership role” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003, p. 116) or be a “participant-as-observer” (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 13). Refugee shelters in Cologne are generally closed places as such,⁶⁹ so I determined that volunteering would be the most optimal and relevant channel for entry.⁷⁰ I contacted two TSOs that administered the shelters in the district where I lived.⁷¹ My volunteer access determined the case study sites. When arranging my work with the volunteer coordinators, I was told that I would work in a shelter near my residence because this was how volunteers with non-specialized skills were distributed. I was upfront in my inquiry about my status as a PhD student with research interests. The disclosure did not lead to resistance of my request to volunteer.

This entry point and case selection was not problematic because I was interested in everyday or “typical” experiences of refugee life. In what Patton calls “typical case sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 236), the purpose is to “[illuminate] key issues that must be considered in any [...] that kind” of case. Entering via volunteer channels meant I would be assigned to a non-specialized shelter in my district in a standard manner. As typical cases, these district shelters were “not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant or intensely unusual” (Patton, 2002, p. 236). They housed a variety of refugees in residential-like facilities in various stages of the legal process. They differed with regards to some specific qualities (for example, their proximity to transportation or whether rooms had private kitchens), but these deviations were in and of themselves typical characteristics of the experience living in a shelter. Further, experiencing the diversity and banal experiences of typical shelter living meant that I would be exposed to the common components of agency and opportunity structure that would influence empowerment outcomes.

I began with volunteer work—language tutoring and childcare activities—at two shelters where I was assigned (Shelter 1 and Shelter 2). Initially, I wanted to work only at one shelter to study the dynamics of a singular shelter environment as a contained unit. However, practical considerations supported my decision to expand work to other shelters (3 and 4). A few months into fieldwork, due to decrepit building conditions and a lack of funds to repair them, the City of Cologne planned to evict half the residents in Shelter 1, where the majority of my relationships and connection points were. I decided to continue work with residents in their new shelters because I did not want to risk completely losing what had taken time to build. This decision was also thematically supported. By this time, it was already apparent that residents did not necessarily consider their shelter spaces communities per se (Chapter 7). Thus, it seemed less important to focus on singular shelters as “communities” if residents themselves did not necessarily see them as such.

⁶⁸ Although I spoke on singular occasions with refugees in two additional shelters (and visited one participant in hotel accommodations after she had been transferred from Shelter 2), I did not conduct ongoing observational fieldwork in these locations (beyond the notes I took in the context of these interviews). I included insights from these conversations because they were cohesive and relevant, despite being external to my primary locations of work.

⁶⁹ The volunteer entry point is similar to what Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) describe in fieldwork in care facilities for the mentally handicapped, which are not places where “strangers do often show up and stay to become friends” (p. 116). See also Christ et al. (2017, p. 10) for a discussion about how their requests to enter NRW refugee shelters with a research permit were frequently ignored or outright denied by shelter managers and local officials.

⁷⁰ See also Tinney (2008) and Vogler (2007) for discussions on the benefits of volunteerism as an entry point.

⁷¹ I contacted both Diakonisches Werk and the German Red Cross. Diakonisches Werk is the state-supported charitable organization of the German Evangelical Church. The German Red Cross is the German national contingent of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent organization.

4.2.4 Interviews

Interviews allow naturalistic researchers to understand experiences in which they did not participate, reconstruct events in people's lives and bridge sociocultural categories to gain insight into experiences unlike their own (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). I relied on two forms of interviewing: semi-structured interviewing to make use of an interview guide and conversational interviewing to take advantage of context-rich data within field settings and better understand their influences on one another. In total, I conducted 48 semi-structured interviews with experts and actors relevant to the institutional space and 16 semi-structured interviews with refugee families. In addition to the conversational interviews, I also had with these 16 families, I collected conversational interview data from ongoing contact with an additional 12 families (Appendices A and B include detailed overviews on expert and refugee interviewees).

4.2.4.1 *Semi-structured interviews*

Anchored by a thematically- or topically driven interview guide (Flick, 2009, p. 156; Kvale, 1983, p. 174), semi-structured interviews ensure "that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person," but the researcher is "free to explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate" each particular subject outlined within the guide (Patton, 2002, p. 343). These interviews were well suited towards interactions with institutional actors, that is, namely professionals and experts working in the refugee space (Bernard, 2006, p. 212). The context of two professionals meeting to discuss a mutually relevant topic of interest was commonplace and thus did not require hours of rapport building or convincing to be able to receive answers to a straightforward list of questions in a set amount of time. These interviews took place in professional office spaces or in quiet areas of public cafes. To respect professionals' time, I limited these interviews to one hour in length.

Although it was often easier to collect data from refugee participants in conversational interviews, semi-structured interviews also had benefits. Primarily, it was important from a triangulation perspective to be able to confirm themes and concepts from field data using more formal tools in parallel. These interviews took place in the shelters, but also in cafes and library areas. I always defaulted to speak where the interviewee would feel most comfortable. In order to minimize participatory stress, I limited these interviews to two hours in length.

Based on the theoretical concepts outlined in Chapter 2, I developed three separate interview guides: one for refugees, one for institutional experts and one for shelter personnel (Appendices J—L). My interview guides directed the main conversational themes in each interview, but I did not always ask all questions. Participants would often answer multiple questions or touch on multiple themes at once, meaning that I did not need to use time asking questions about those topics explicitly.

4.2.4.2 *Conversational interviews*

The nature of naturalistic research brings about natural opportunities to ask questions directly within the field setting (Murchison, 2010, p. 100). Conversational interviewing⁷² offered "maximum flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate," based on emerging events or conversations occurring in real-time within a particular setting (Patton, 2002, p. 342). It was quickly apparent that to eschew such a critical, context-specific tool for data collection would be a grave mistake. In general, scheduling formal interviews with refugees was extremely difficult, given the negative connotations many had with interviews, interpreters and appointments from the context of pursuing their asylum claims.

When I began to act more as an engaged conversationalist (Patton, 2002, p. 342), it was easy to see that repeated, ongoing conversations with the same people yielded rich data, often more than what I could gather in a structured interview. A conversational interview might last for two or three hours with little

⁷² Conversational interviewing is also referred to as informal (Bernard, 2006, p. 210–212), unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365) or ethnographic (Flick, 2009, p. 169) interviewing.

stress or complaint other than my needing to leave “too early.”⁷³ Conversational interviews with refugee participants occurred in a variety of settings. Primarily, they took the form of long meals or teatime, in which I simply visited and spoke with the families for as long as they wished, in German to the best of their abilities (see Section 4.2.1.2), about their experiences in daily life. I did no writing during these sessions to preserve the sense of intimacy that sometimes felt lacking when speaking in more planned settings via an interpreter.

The conversations were largely self-directed. This meant that I was receiving meaningful information because it was brought up independently without prompting (Murchison, 2010, p. 102). This added depth and validity to my structured interview findings in that the unprompted themes that were important to people were extremely similar to what was uncovered during formal sessions. Keeping in mind the theoretical concepts from my interview guide in the field helped to better target my listening and ask relevant questions.

I was also able to utilize this technique when participating in volunteer and educational events in which many different types of refugee workers, experts and city actors were present. These events were designed by their hosts to be forums for dialog and collaboration for those working within the refugee context. I considered conversational interviewing within these contexts to be taking advantage of a form of participatory knowledge exchange in which I could learn from the “human-to-human relations” we all shared as refugee specialists, workers and advocates (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366).

4.2.5 Sampling

In cases of naturalistic research on sensitive topics, nonprobability sampling most often drives interview data gathering efforts (Bernard, 2006, p. 186; see also Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; Hendriks, Blanken, & Adriaans, 1992; Lee, 1993; Marshall, 1996). I used a combination of convenience, purposeful and snowball sampling to gather interview data at different stages of the research process. I used convenience sampling, selecting based on accessibility, is to enter the field, get “in touch with the first cases” (Flick, 2009, p. 433) and assess the trajectory of the later sampling and connection points (Morse, 2010, p. 235). As the research progressed, my relationships with gate keepers and key informants grew, and I was able to utilize purposeful and snowball sampling to make further connections to others. By purposeful sampling, I mean I was able to consider the characteristics of the study site (Patton, 2002, p. 236) and the theoretical concepts of the research (Morse, 2010, p. 235) to target specific individuals for conversation because they were “experts in the experience” of working with or living as refugees (Morse, 2010, p. 231). By snowball sampling, I mean that I was able to ask families, personnel or volunteers I knew well to introduce me and my work to others to possibly talk to them as well (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 154; Patton, 2002, p. 237).

Although anyone might be considered to be an “expert of his or her own life” (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 18), I categorized experts (for interview purposes) as those with an “institutionalized authority to construct reality” (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 19), meaning I sought them out in their formal capacities as doers of work and support within the institutional context of refugee care provisioning. Refugees, on the other hand, were the people directly living the experience of being a refugee as the institutional context identified them. As these were two different sets of research participants, I used slightly different strategies to access each.

The need to include a variety of interviews was due to both what each type of participant could discuss, as well as ease of coordination. Refugee participants were obviously able to share their perspectives on what they thought governmental institutions did and their perceived effects on their own lives. But experts and personnel could comment more specifically on the design and function of these institutions, the

⁷³ I received multiple invitations to “stay the night” in shelters with families when our meals or conversations ran well into the evenings. Despite the opportunities for observation such invitations would have produced, I always declined for ethical reasons. Because this was against shelter rules without prior approval, to accept the invitations would have put families at risk for disciplinary action or possibly me at risk to lose my volunteer access to shelters.

successes or failures of specific mechanisms and overall effects on refugees in a broader sense. Since some experts could share their intimate knowledge of daily life in shelters, insights their interviews counterbalanced the difficulties in obtaining similar interview data from a high number of refugee families. This approach allowed me to collect data to a point of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with varied evidence for concepts under investigation (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 164). In line with Fusch and Ness (2015), I collected until I had data that was thick (in quantity) and rich (in quality, that is to say, “many-layered, intricate, detailed [and] nuanced,” p. 1409).

4.2.5.1 Experts

The nature of expert interviewing dictated that sampling be largely purposeful (Flick, 2009, p. 168). I selected experts deliberately who were “experienced and knowledgeable” in specific topics so they could answer the research questions with relevant insight (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64). I also utilized snowball sampling to identify other key players via experts’ introductions (Wroblewski & Leitner, 2009, p. 241). In total, I conducted 48 semi-structured interviews with experts at various institutional levels (Appendix B). Desk research pointed me to the agencies of general importance within the refugee space in Cologne and NRW. This variety included municipal politicians, municipal agency administrators, lawyers, police, shelter personnel (such as social workers, security officers and key volunteers), TSO and charity service providers, volunteer coordinators and activists. I also consulted lists of elected representatives and working groups in the City of Cologne. I contacted individuals first who were named across a variety of sources, since this was indicative of entrenched presence within the political context. I began first with these interviews. I discussed my sampling strategy with these participants and asked them if they could help me narrow down who else to contact to ensure I was reaching relevant experts. Often, these referrals were also on the same committee lists or had been previously identified through fieldwork activities.

The sampling of shelter personnel was both convenient and purposeful in that they were the actors I had access to by virtue of their positions in the shelters I worked at, but their positions simultaneously gave them specific insights that were relevant and necessary to the research. I interviewed social workers and personnel at each of my primary field sites, some of whom worked in other shelters where I also worked. I also observed which volunteers were especially active and asked them for interviews. These volunteers sometimes referred me to prominent local activists, as well as key coordinators from their local volunteer initiatives (both of which had sometimes been previously identified on committee lists). This direct feedback and repetition of names gave me confidence that I had interviewed an adequate sample of relevant actors.

4.2.5.2 Refugees

Similarly, I relied on nonprobability (convenience, snowball and purposeful) sampling to obtain interviews with refugee participants.⁷⁴ I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with refugee families and individuals, along with conversational interviews with these families and 12 others, for a total contact with 28 families and individuals. The sample of participants reflected the diverse reality of shelter life, emphasizing the range of possible assets and capabilities to apply within daily life by spanning variation in countries of origin, time in Germany, legal status, family structures and socioeconomic backgrounds (Table 12; see Appendix A for detailed demographic descriptions of each refugee participant and the locations of their residencies).

⁷⁴ These sampling approaches have been used frequently when researching asylum seekers and undocumented migrants and access has proved challenging (for example, Bilger & van Liempt, 2009 and Dahinden & Efonayi-Mäder, 2009).

Countries of origin (12)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syria: 7 • Afghanistan: 4 • Iraq: 3 • Albania: 3 • Nigeria: 3 • Ghana: 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran: 1 • Turkey: 1 • Bangladesh: 1 • Pakistan: 1 • Serbia: 1 • Cameroon: 1
Time in Germany (average: 2.5 years)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <2 years: 3 • 2 – 3 years: 19 • 3 – 4+ years: 6 	
Sex*	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male: 22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female: 28
Marital / child status	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single: 9 • Married: 16 • Divorced: 1 • Widowed: 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With children: 22 • Without children: 6
Legal status	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum seekers: 2 • Recognized refugee status: 8 • Subsidiary protection status: 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial / Toleration status: 8 • Denial / other right to remain (ex., residency through child): 3
Educational status**	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No / minimal formal school: 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male: 3 • Female: 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary / secondary school: 23 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male: 12 • Female: 11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-secondary school: 16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male: 8 • Female: 8

Table 12. Demographic characteristics of refugee participants.

**Note:* Count of male and female exceeds 28 due to including male and female family members as separate individuals; interview total sums distinct family units.

***Note:* Lack of formal education did not preclude the reception of technical training/education through employment in host countries. Educational status is totaled when available.

I used convenience sampling at a fundamental level simply in that I was not able to choose the shelters at which I was assigned to volunteer, nor did city regulations allow free access to any shelter of choosing. In line with Flick's (2009, p. 122) acknowledgment that such sampling is often a result of issues of access, resources or practicality, this meant that, at least initially before expanding networks, I was constrained to work within the shelters I was assigned. To limit the scope of data gathering noise and concentrate my efforts and ability to conduct naturalistic research, I chose to focus on establishing myself and building rapport within these shelters. Residents of these shelters were the initial "convenience" pool of potential participants from which I could draw. As I began to nurse these initial connections, it was possible to use other sampling strategies to expand who I was able to talk to. Snowball sampling helped to make introductions to others in the shelter. Purposeful opportunistic sampling, or "emergent sampling [that] takes advantage of whatever [conditions] unfold [as they unfold]," also helped me to utilize conditions in the field to meet others as the opportunities presented themselves (Patton, 2002, p. 240). This meant I was open to make introductions to families who approached me in the shelter. I always capitalized on these opportunities to develop new relationships and speak with new families on their terms.

At the same time, the sensitive research made sampling difficult and imperfect. Issues of trust and perception influenced the number of refugees I was able to talk to, the primary reason for the lower number of interviews with refugee participants than with experts. Trust was a complex topic and involved matters of my own positionality, but also people's own past negative experiences in dealing with the unknown.⁷⁵ Despite my ongoing presence in the shelter and clear friendships with some families, it was often difficult for refugees to see me as somebody whose motives they could completely understand. I addressed these challenges primarily by nurturing the connections I was able to make, going deep and focusing on quality interactions. I had multiple conversations in many different circumstances with the individuals and families I knew well. I supplemented and complemented this refugee data with varied data from other sources.

Although the participants were diverse and encompassed a wide variety of demographic characteristics, they nonetheless shared the primary condition of interest, that is, they were refugee migrants with experience living in shelters and navigating daily life within a complex legal framework (Al-Sharmani, 2003). Fundamentally, a quality sample is one that includes people "with characteristics necessary for [the] qualitative inquiry (i.e., representative of the experience" (Morse, 2010, p. 232). Even with their varied demographic backgrounds, residents embodied the experience of inquiry. Being able to talk to a variety of residents as they lived meant that I was simply learning about the commonalities of their everyday shelter and legal realities, while experiencing individual residential diversity. These qualities were simultaneously advantageous from a perspective of maximum diversity sampling. Capturing and describing central themes across "a great deal of [individual] variation" meant that the common patterns emerging embodied "the core experiences and central, shared dimensions" of the situation at hand (Patton, 2002, p. 234–235). As such, when discussing interview data within the empirical chapters, I emphasize collective descriptions as needed to highlight the salience of the themes shared among the various participants. This does not imply representativeness or generalizability to all of Cologne's or Germany's refugees, but rather, consolidates observations and data points available to present key, shared commonalities.

4.3. Data analysis and coding

Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used approaches to analyze text (Swain, 2018, p. 5). It relies on grouping basic units of coded data into broader concepts at an "interpretative latent level" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 12) in order to identify "the most salient constellations of meanings" (Joffe, 2012, p. 209); report and analyze patterns; and describe the data in rich detail within an organized framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This analytic approach was well suited to the research questions and theoretical framework. It allowed me to systematically examine and organize "the perspectives of different research participants" (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 2), helping to identify "the specific domains of life in which individuals and groups may be empowered" (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 86).

In line with the coding process suggested in Braun and Clarke (2006), I ensured I was constantly familiar with my data. Using these familiarizations, along with theory and indicators from literature (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Yardley, 2004), I constructed the coding template. I constructed the template both deductively and inductively, beginning in one state based on the theoretical presumptions, but modifying as the analysis progressed to expand and collapse certain codes as the data dictated (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2016; King, 2004; Swain, 2018). I arranged the template hierarchically to represent the relationship between themes (King, 2004). This allowed the template to act as a data management tool to "ease in interpretation and to search for confirming [or] disconfirming evidence of these interpretations" (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 99).

⁷⁵ After reflecting on many experiences in the field, I observed that: "many people still fear who they might talk to; there is a lack of trust because of a culture of fear. In many countries, [...] it would be difficult to know if your neighbor might turn against you. [...] Many people, as a result, wish to keep to themselves either to avoid the risk, or simply because it is what they have become used to" (Field notes, April 18, 2018).

In the template, I included code names, along with descriptions of the codes to ensure coding consistency (Boyatzis, 1998). I utilized three types of codes: attribute codes, time codes and concept codes. Attribute codes were demographic characteristics of participants to explore how individual agency characteristics related to other thematic concepts (Saldaña, 2009, p. 56). These codes were also necessary to have a way to account for the diversity in sample size and explore common patterns shared despite differences. I coded speakers in interview transcripts and field notes with these characteristics. Time codes helped to explore feelings developing across time or related specifically to certain points within the asylum application process. Finally, the majority of codes were concept codes, that is, fundamental “analytic unit[s] of meaning” topically related to the research questions and underlying theories (Swain, 2018, p. 9).

I made use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.TI 8) to code data based on the template. When consolidating and analyzing codes and levels of meaning, I wanted them to be internally homogeneous (they adhered together in a meaningful way) and externally heterogeneous (their differences were clear and unidentifiable) (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 12; Patton, 2002, p. 465). This helped identify the most relevant themes, that is, the patterns that organized and described the concepts maximally answering the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161). I used Atlas.TI 8 to help with this consolidation and identify the outcomes I describe in the empirical chapters.

4.3.1 Coding indicators for assessment

Finding ways of assessing and identifying how concepts of agency, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes manifested within the variants of experience was the primary purpose of the coding template. Codes served as indicators to relate concepts from relevant literature and theory back to the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 209). I applied indicator codes for agency, opportunity structure and empowerment outcomes contextually within the specific domains (legal, economic, social) of the theoretical framework (Figure 1). The empirical chapters focus separately on each domain and are organized by analyzing agency conditions and the bounds of opportunity structure first, before discussing their interaction as empowerment outcomes. Organizing the analysis by domain does not imply rigidity between the categories; rather, it is done to offer a clearer way to review the influence of specific legal conditions related to types of behavior (i.e., participating in society as a legal, economic or social agent), as well as to understand how various themes of struggle or success are similar or different across areas of living.

As noted previously, the coding template included attribute codes, time codes and concept codes. All three types of codes demonstrated connections back to the central theoretical principles so that they could produce relevant analysis. Demographic attribute codes namely applied to refugee participants, but they were one way to indicate and track the various capital components of agency (Table 1) that could contribute to different outcomes (Figure 1, Figure 2). For example, education level and previous profession were clear indicators of human assets potentially at an individual’s disposal (Messer & Townsley, 2003, p. 8–9), and marital status, family in Germany and children were indicators of types of social assets (Samman & Santos, 2009). Other demographic characteristics were related to what resources individuals might have more or less access to because “command over one asset [...often] affect[s] the endowment of another asset” (Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006, p. 86). For example, country of origin, age, sex, shelter location, time in Germany and legal status affected primarily the types of support programs or measures refugee participants were eligible to take advantage of (financial, material, human or social assets), but also the extent to which previously established ethnic networks might serve as pillars of support (social or organizational assets). Time codes represented links to the institutional structure that similarly governed the set of physical and financial resources, livelihood programs and living arrangements that refugees were subjected to at various stages of the asylum process.

Concept codes indicating both the presence of relevant factors, as well as the nature of their use, comprised the majority of the coding template. Given the multiple dimensions of the framework and the variety of possible indicators, these were the most complex to develop. To begin with, I organized the basic hierarchy of codes directly in a manner consistent with the organization of the framework. This meant I had three types of indicator codes: indicators for agency, indicators for constraints or supports within the opportunity structure and indicators for the degree to which interactions of the prior two types affected choice. Agency indicators were the most extensive because they were based on the variety of asset types and capabilities that expand people's potential to "participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (Narayan, 2005b, p. 5). Thus, I derived first-level code categories based on consolidating primary asset and capability types as found across key literature (Alsop et al., 2006; Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005; Holland & Brook, 2004; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Narayan, 2005a; Samman & Santos, 2009): psychological, human, organizational, social, financial, informational and material. In constructing indicators to assess elements of the opportunity structure, I derived the first-level categories based on Petesch et al.'s (2005) primary influences on opportunity structure: institutional openness, unity in dominant power and implementation capacity.

To operationalize these indicators, I relied heavily on process coding, that is, the use of action-based gerunds, "exclusively to connote action in data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 77 citing Charmaz, 2001). This meant that codes not only captured *having* or *lacking* specific things, but also, how participants were *responding to, feeling, fulfilling, meeting, exceeding, aspiring to, utilizing, maintaining* and *viewing* within these conditions. Although the mere observation of specific assets or institutional conditions can also be indicators of agency (Samman & Santos, 2009), agency and empowered outcomes are most clearly enumerated through action or result (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002, p. 19; Narayan, 2005b, p. 15). Thus, the use of process coding allowed for assessing consequences of action (Saldaña, 2009, p. 77), as well as understanding sub-processes of "individual tactics, strategies and routine that [made] up the bigger act" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 169) I also utilized magnitude coding (Saldaña, 2009, p. 59) to express notions of degree or extent. This coding was helpful in evaluating institutional structures and legal content. It answered questions about the extent to which these structures did or did not account for certain rights and provisions in people's daily living. It was also useful in coding for the choice-based outcomes of the framework: the presence of choice, use of choice and effectiveness of choice (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). It helped assess the degree to which participants felt they could utilize resources and choices at their disposal, as well as the extent to which they felt their efforts had been successful.

Ultimately, building the coding template around the analysis framework helped to identify relevant indicators. This in turn assisted with fulfilling the primary aim of a coding template, that is, "the development of conceptual themes and their clustering into broader groupings, and the eventual identification across cases of 'master themes' with their subsidiary 'constituent themes'" (King, 2004, p. 258).

4.4. Ethics, consent and confidentiality

Research on refugees cannot occur in a morally neutral context (Birman, 2006). Because refugee life is defined by the intersecting conditions of human suffering, cultural diversity, political power and public opinion, researchers face ethical issues unique to working within such a space (Birman, 2006). This forces researchers to face the "dual imperative" in refugee research of balancing the ultimate purpose of reducing human suffering with the need for both ethical and procedural rigor (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003, p. 185).

Given the sensitive conditions in which I undertook this research, I have aimed to reach this balance. The project in its entirety received ethical clearance from the ethics review board of the Center for Development Research (ZEF) in accordance with the procedures of the Bonn International Graduate School for Development Research Doctoral Program. For additional support in general decision making and design approaches, I also consulted the guidelines of the European Commission Directorate-General for research

with refugees (European Commission, 2016b), as well as those of the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Center (UORSC, 2007), based on similar guidelines set forth by the Association of Social Anthropologists. The following sections briefly expand on issues of ethics.

4.4.1 Ethics in design

Because of their past experiences with political persecution and opaque government asylum procedures, refugees in research settings often feel reluctance to collaborate with perceived public agents, including researchers, or participate in seemingly legalistic procedures (Birman, 2006; Lipson, 1993). In this regard, I sought qualitative approaches that balanced ethical considerations and procedural relevance. Conversations and personal interviewing instead encouraged deeper discussions (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997) of “subjective feelings and reactions” because topics of discussion were not placed within the context of objective (i.e., positive or negative) bounds (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 485). They helped invite participants into the research as collaborators, offering them “power [...] to shape the research agenda,” thus minimizing misunderstandings and undue harm (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003, p. 137). This flexibility was particularly important to mitigate emotional distress from unpleasant memories or traumatic experiences that sometimes arose in interview situations with refugees (Cowles, 1988).⁷⁶

Although becoming familiar with realities of a new social world is the heart of ethnographic research, to get overly involved is often considered an ethical confound (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). At the same time, establishing trust usually involves the dynamics of giving and receiving (Lammers, 2005) and can come with the expectation of help. I did not ever want to create false expectations about what my presence entailed. I also wanted to ensure more equalized power dynamics from both sides. Neither did I want refugee participants to feel obligated to talk to me because they felt they owed me for something any more than I wanted them to take advantage of me to exploit my time, language skills or sympathy. This meant that I strictly limited my task-based assistance to what I provided in my role as a volunteer and the sharing of publicly available information about resources and programs refugees could freely pursue themselves.

To fulfill my part in the art of exchange and relationship building, I preferred to become a part of the cultural economy of reciprocity (Lammers, 2005, p. 8), meaning I offered adherence to cultural norms of politeness (Lipson, 1993) and contextual ways of demonstrating actions of trust and sharing. This included bringing sweets as small hostess gifts, learning a few simple niceties in people’s native languages or taking tea together at the start of a visit. More importantly, I also offered company and made myself available at request to share food or simply talk about how life was going. This was a mutually beneficial approach that helped to construct our relationships with less pretense in that we could simply be kind to one another in typical, everyday ways that were culturally and contextually relevant. I knew this approach had been successful when, despite my refusal to provide larger, more tangible forms of assistance, many families still wished to engage me in the regular exchange of small foodstuffs or household goods and even referred to me as “sister.”

4.4.2 Managing informed consent

Consent procedures can be challenging in qualitative research that is iterative and evolving (Bell, 2014). Treating consent is an ongoing process, a dialog and a type of information exchange addresses this and emphasizes quality over form (AAA, 2012, p. 4). Within the context of refugee research, the UORSC (2007, p. 165) and European Commission (2016b, p. 2) guidelines emphasize this point similarly.

Conditions of consent can be disclosed with varying degrees of technicality and precision over the course of ongoing exchange (European Commission, 2016b, p. 2). Frequently explaining in different ways, I conversed with participants about the purpose of my work, the use of their insights, the assurance of

⁷⁶ Kavanaugh and Ayres (1998) and Allmark et al. (2009) offer extensive review and justification for many of the strategies I also employed in interviews to handle situations that were distressing for participants.

confidentiality and the possibilities of distress. I also offered relevant information at relevant times (Lugosi, 2006). I was always, unequivocally upfront with anybody I interacted with, but I also communicated specific level of detail with respect to a person's language ability and the context in which we interacted.⁷⁷ It was critical to "build trust gradually through becoming familiar" in order to be able to access any information at all, lest initial discomfort be too frightening to overcome (Lipson, 1993, p. 346).

In line with European Commission (2016b), the consent process for observations and interviews with refugees was always verbal because the use of written consent forms in a migrant context can be quite problematic (Birman, 2006; Jacob, 2007). Varying literacy abilities may mean forms are not comprehensible at all, without accounting for the logistics of translating legalistic forms into multiple languages. Further, signing forms creates written records and thus potential privacy concerns. Refugees may also simply not want to sign official-looking documents for fear that they will be misused or misunderstood. Verbal consent also helps avoid imbalanced power relations in that consent forms can further objectify participants by positioning them as the literal objects of study within a domineering researcher-subject hierarchy. Especially with refugee participants, ongoing verbal consent also helped to give me more real-time information about whether to stop or proceed in a challenging circumstance. On the other hand, with experts and professionals, I took a more formalized approach to consent. I prepared a formal consent form in English and German to read through and sign in order to understand and consent to the conditions of participating.⁷⁸ I always sent the form in advance of scheduled interviews to give them a chance to read it, ask questions about participation or rescind their initial acceptance to participate.

One final aspect of consent I emphasized with both refugees and experts was "not being drawn into promising what [I was] unlikely to be able to produce" (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007, p. 2227). With experts, it was important to be upfront about when the finished research would be available and that the results would not be statistically generalizable. With refugees, it was even more important to communicate that their participation would likely not change their lives much, if at all. I could only tell them that their insights were valuable to me and that I believed they had the possibility to be useful in the future to help policy making take relevant lived experiences into account.

4.4.3 Maintaining confidentiality

Confidentiality must be prioritized in order to best protect research participants and honor the trust built with them (UORSC, 2007).⁷⁹ Guaranteeing anonymity, however, goes beyond merely removing names and must also include ways to minimize how participants can be identified from context (Librett & Perrone, 2010; van Liempt & Bilger, 2012). To this end, I have prioritized the anonymity of participants, both experts and refugees, using techniques standard to sensitive research.⁸⁰ This included the use of alphanumeric identifiers instead of names or pseudonyms within field notes and interviews; the redaction of specific professional, locality or organizational details wherever possible; and the careful use of quotations. All but a few experts consented to use their names with their data. However, I nonetheless decided to generalize professional titles and quote all responses anonymously.

⁷⁷ See Lugosi (2006) (in his ethnography of a gay bar) and Lipson (1993) (in her experiences working with Afghan refugees) for more discussion on divulging information gradually in stages to build rapport.

⁷⁸ The German version was proofread by native German speakers at the university writing center and approved by the ZEF ethics committee.

⁷⁹ Researchers are bound to follow data use and privacy laws (UORSC, 2007, p. 166; European Commission, 2016b, p. 4). By anonymizing all raw data, not making it publicly accessible in any way and controlling for its unauthorized use, I have ensured that participants' data will be utilized only in the manner agreed to within the confines of consent agreements.

⁸⁰ See, for example, the procedures in Barsky (2009) dealing with confidentiality working with incarcerated migrants.

Fundamentally, I questioned the benefits from disclosing the names of interviewees. Disclosure might only be meaningful to a small contingency of particularly informed readers in Cologne who understood the social or political significance of having been able to connect with such people.⁸¹ Further, the public nature of many experts' work placed attributed words at risk for misuse or manipulation, especially within the current climate of discourse in Germany where certain viewpoints on immigration policy might be socially or politically harmful. Translation issues gave me further concern in this regard because translations are reconstructions of utterances (van Nes et al., 2010). Ultimately, I did not feel comfortable that words from my research could be misused against participants in ways I could not foresee or control.

An additional question of anonymization concerned whether to disclose the specific shelter sites in which I worked. Having chosen a case study construct relying on micro-environments, I wondered initially if the names and specific locative details of each site would need to be disclosed as to bring any explicit effects related to them to the forefront of analysis. However, as the research progressed, I realized this was not necessary to ensure the quality of analysis because the shelters represented typical cases and conditions of refugee living (see Section 4.2.3.1). I also realized that participants would often describe the qualities of shelter living environments more broadly, especially since they had lived in a variety of accommodation types and could speak generally about the qualities they considered helpful or harmful. The nature of these narratives and my observations allowed me to analyze positive and negative conditions of daily living thematically without necessarily needing to identify the specific locations of living. From an ethical perspective, I was also more comfortable keeping the specific sites unnamed. Given that many shelters were small (in the number of personnel and residents) and located in distinct areas, offering too many details as such could easily identify both the personnel and residents who wished to remain anonymous.

Summary

Choosing research approaches means choosing benefits and trade-offs that best advance the research questions and objectives (Bennett, 2011). I have explained the rationale of my research approaches in the preceding sections. These choices have advanced the aim of organizing "a coherent picture [...] of interlocked concepts" and their relation to underlying explanatory theories (Neuman, 2007, p. 329).

Table 13 summarizes the main theoretical components of the research questions and the data sources used to investigate them. Throughout the course of the research process, I relied on iteration, practicality and creativity to best utilize available resources to do "the best job possible" within a naturalistic and unpredictable field setting (Patton, 2002, p. 401), using a stable structure of methodological conventions (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 12). I utilized a robustly developed coding template, based on indicators related to theoretical concepts and themes grounded within the data, to analyze secondary data, legal documents, interviews and observational field notes. I made necessary adjustments for the unique conditions of working within the space of refugee research. These considerations included those preempted by the ethical and logistical complexities of working with a vulnerable population; mediating between languages and cultures not my own; and reflecting on my own positionality.

⁸¹ I acknowledge that the specialized insights such insider readers might possess could allow them to identify expert participants by the generalized titles I used or the context of utterances. However, I made clear the theoretical possibility of such attributions in the written consent forms. All experts, even those expressly wishing to remain anonymous, agreed to the conditions and information included in the consent form.

THEORETICAL COMPONENT	DATA SOURCES
Case details, historical context	<i>Secondary data:</i> policy documents, literature
<i>Agency:</i> Assets and capabilities	<i>Secondary data:</i> policy documents, literature <i>Primary data:</i> conversational interviews; semi-structured interviews; observational data
<i>Governmental opportunity structure:</i> Legal, policy and administrative frameworks	<i>Secondary data:</i> policy documents, literature <i>Primary data:</i> conversational interviews; semi-structured interviews; observational data
<i>Empowerment outcomes:</i> Presence, use, achievement/effectiveness of choice	<i>Primary data:</i> conversational interviews; semi-structured interviews; observational data

Table 13. Overview of key theoretical concepts and data sources to investigate them.

The qualitative researcher is a “bricoleur” who is creative in craft and flexible in approach, influenced by personal history and compelled to weave complex, interpretive quilts of meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9; see also Becker, 1998, p. 11). As such a bricoleur, I present in the following empirical chapters the results of my research, a “sequence of representations connecting the part to the whole” and reflective montage of “fluid, interconnected images and representations” of individuals enduring and overcoming challenges of everyday living in Cologne refugee shelters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9).

5. Navigating the Bounds of Status in the Legal Domain

Enduring legal complexities: E1, a middle-aged Cameroonian single mother with three children, an unplanned pregnancy and fluctuating case status

During her many months as an asylum seeker in Cologne, E1 lives in the more provisional types of municipal shelter. Coming from Cameroon, she has a somewhat unrealistic chance to receive a positive decision on her asylum claim and so is less prioritized for a local move into more apartment-like shelter accommodations. I meet her originally in an emergency shelter (Shelter 2) through a volunteer assignment. She is transferred here from another emergency facility because a private room opens up, which the city deems a health consideration for her in the months prior to delivering her third child. As an emergency shelter, the multi-story, repurposed office complex houses over 300 people from over 20 countries, many of whom are processed in and out carrying only a few trash bags of possessions. There are few places for the shelter residents to gather on the shelter grounds. Residents have no access to kitchen facilities and must instead wait in cafeteria lines for meals at certain times during the day, often skipped due to the necessity of attending government appointments or language classes. Many asylum seekers with low prospects of remaining (including many from Balkan countries) live here, meaning that many wait months and months for case decisions with little productive to do. Idleness is a common activity that seems to drive contention with the German residents immediately nearby, as brawls, loud skirmishes and loitering seem to have become more common in the local streets and parking lots. About six months after we meet, E1 is transferred out of this shelter into a room in a hotel acting as overflow shelter space.

The shelter social worker assigned to E1 is her main contact for bureaucratic assistance and feels that it might help her to have an English-speaking partner with whom she might receive help with some basic daily living tasks, like shopping or even just company for her and her children. The social worker explains to me that she receives little such support thus far. As an asylum seeker from Cameroon, she technically has access to an integration language course, but lack of availability prioritizes those from higher-probability to remain countries. More practically, she needs care for her three children, all younger than five, and there are few courses open with childcare. There is no availability either in local *Kita* childcare facilities, so it is also difficult for her to attend volunteer-led courses or other TSO activities. Due to the shelter rules, she is unable to have any individual visitors to her room, such as private tutors or even a social-partner such as myself, even in an official volunteer context. The social worker explains an exception to the policy is not possible. There are a few other African residents E1 knows in the shelter, but she does not speak much French and they not much English. Her closest friend there is a slightly younger single mother from Ghana, X1, who also speaks English and has a child near in age to her youngest.

When we meet, E1, in her mid-30s, lives without a partner in a single room with her children. Her parents, along with six siblings who work together running a larger family farm, remain in Cameroon. There, she completes some university-level coursework in linguistics and education before leaving the country with her then-husband. She tells me that she leaves the university in Cameroon, largely due to family pressure to get married. Her husband promises to support her ongoing education and work in Spain, where they migrate in 2012. There, they have their first two children. However, it remains perpetually unclear to me, through her stories and my questions, if they live there with or without documents. E1 often alludes to her lack of access to formal support channels while there. But she also describes receiving work permissions in Spain that allow her and her husband to work a small number of hours a week for a capped stipend of money that does not feel enough to live on (Interview with E1, July 13, 2017). It remains possible that she herself may not know her exact legal status there. Poverty, and general marital discord, prompt her to leave her husband, taking her children when she is pregnant with their third child in 2016.

Complicating the likelihood of a positive case outcome in Germany—and underlying many issues we often discuss—is both the legal status of her marriage, as well as the time living in Spain with a similarly unclear legal status. Whether separated in marriage only physically or legally—by Spanish or Cameroonian law—remains unclear to me, but E1 considers herself formally separated. She times her departure from her husband with stories she follows about refugee migrants being let into Germany with presumed increasing ease. Incidentally, she “loses all her papers” on the way from Spain, but thinks it might not be problematic to file an asylum application in Germany, although she tells me she has been “fingerprinted” in Spain and somehow documented her claims about marital difficulties there (Interview with E1, July 13, 2017).

Despite these complexities, her case is processed not as a possible Dublin transfer case in Germany, but as a new asylum application. She has been waiting for just over a year on a decision when we meet. At the time, she often has difficulty explaining exactly what her status as an asylum seeker means for her in practicality. She explains to me that she has a theoretical right to work—a fact that is legally true as an asylum seeker from her origin country who has stayed over three months—but she tells me how she thinks this means her asylum case has been decided positively and she just has not yet received word (Interview with E1, July 13, 2017). She understands that she currently receives benefits through the social welfare office and will be transferred to the Job Center if her case is adjudicated positively, but she often talks about how this will include obligatory higher-education and job placement, neither of which are exactly true, despite the increased access she would have to an integration language course and possible municipal initiatives for general labor-market entry. At the same time, she often compares her own situation to that of the other African asylum seekers around her, whose longer-term prospects remain similarly tenuous. The most stress for her comes when X1’s asylum application is rejected, an outcome E1 does not understand, given that X1’s child’s father is an Italian citizen with EU citizenship. The child, and thus his mother by extension, ought to have a right to remain through his own EU citizenship; but X1 comes from Ghana, a so-called safe country of origin, and she is unmarried to the father who lives in Italy, adding layers of legal complexity that are difficult for the two women to fully comprehend, but easily cause much fear, worry and uncertainty.

A few months after we meet, E1’s asylum claim is also formally rejected, but she spends the remaining months during my fieldwork working to reverse the decision, also receiving an interim toleration status from the local Foreigners’ Authority due to a combination of factors: the inability to procure all relevant citizenship and immigration documents for herself and her children, a newly developing situation of political conflict in Cameroon and, somewhat ironically, an additional unexpected pregnancy with her estranged husband, who occasionally visits Cologne to see the existing children. With this toleration status, she feels some optimism that there is at least a possibility of an eventual successful appeal, in that she at least has temporary time to fight the case while she waits for her fourth child to be born and considers if it might be possible somehow to reconcile with her husband.

Speaking with E1 about her legal predicament across many meetings reveals, as it does with others, the various intersecting navigational points of legal status and their intermingling with respect to the application of choice across domains of living. Fundamentally, legal status drives access to the varying means of rote support possibilities, benefits and types of life determinants—monetary welfare payments, type of housing, integration language course attendance, childcare. It delineates how and when the channels of support and social participation are opened. But the implementation of E1’s case also reveals the layered conflicts with the German asylum structures themselves that can easily disrupt or complicate these bounds of choice and access. If E1 has previously been registered as a refugee or other type of migrant in Spain, both EU and German law stipulate a clear trajectory for her case to be returned there. But in actuality, along with those of thousands of others, it remains in Germany, under new and uncertain adjudication for months instead, drawing out the process of trying to move on from whatever outcome is delivered. Although her application is given a theoretical chance to be evaluated as a case of persecution—an upstanding humanitarian assumption in theory—the Anglophone crisis, in which the Cameroonian government declares

war against separatists in a particular Anglophone region of the country, does not formally begin until well after E1 migrates to Spain and even Germany. Despite this, E1 often references such conflict in casual conversation, talking about how she positions her case in relevant documentary sessions. By the time her formal rejection comes, the conflict has progressed potentially to the point where it might in fact limit the ability to return back to the country, prompting the consideration of a toleration status that is potentially far removed from the original migration reasons years prior. In the case of E1's childbearing, it is both a tool of legal advantage and practical detriment. In some ways, it increases the day-to-day difficulties in her life as she cares for three young children in single rooms of shelters and limits her practical access to social support and services. But in another way, it also represents a legal channel through which to offer some possibility of status reconciliation by buying additional time to appeal her claim. There are also the components of legality that bleed into social arenas. There is the narrative crafting and personal guardedness that can obscure the truth that might situationally aid or hinder legal and social interactions. There is the lack of individual legal understanding about one's own status possibilities and those of others, which creates confusion and stress when others receive drastically different outcomes, even if their predicaments seem similar on the surface.

For E1, empowerment across intersecting domains might be enhanced through various agency- and structure-related components in the legal domain specifically, such as better information about her status and possibilities, clearer legal channels for rectification and a better legal status itself. She might more easily increase her practical and legal abilities to learn German and work. She wonders if she might be able to be a nurse, or "something else Germany really needs" (Field notes, February 8, 2018). In any case, she tells me, "I really need to get back to school. It's important. I should probably try to improve and study my German language. My documents might be threatened [otherwise]. But I am not sure how I can do it right now" (Field notes, February 8, 2018). Through a job, she feels she might more easily choose to rent an apartment, an obvious increase in comfort and security for a still-growing family. But as she contends with the ongoing irregularity in her status—the changing conditions of pregnancy, conflict in her home country, attempting (or not) to reconcile with a separated partner—and the myriad of different appointments affiliated with it, she has trouble focusing on how exactly she might apply choices to move forward logistically to reach ends in all of these legal, economic and social arenas. As she wonders how she might choose how to navigate these challenges more concretely, she focusses on the small improvements in her life, often acquired also by means less chosen across intersecting domains. "It's better for now," she explains to me, for example, after being transferred from the shelter to a hotel room, "that there are some small burners for cooking and a TV for the kids. And, you and the others can visit now. At least that is better" (Field notes, January 25, 2018).

Introduction

Empowerment in the legal domain is inclusively and productively interacting with the mechanisms of government-body processes and the explicit rights and participatory societal permissions afforded through them. The extent to which refugees are empowered to this end helps them understand, access and utilize the rights and benefits they receive as a result of their legal status, partake effectively in legal procedures and take advantage of legal stability to feel motivated to take root within a new community. For this reason, the conceptual approach of Chapter 2 underscores the importance of political-legal life and participation as a domain of empowerment. This chapter discusses how agency—particularly in the form of information, finances and rote legal status—interacts with governmental institutional frameworks to constrain or enable empowerment participating in legal processes related to asylum adjudication and case management.

The dynamics of these interactions drive the ontological essence of refugeehood. As Chapter 2 suggests, without political structures defining them as such, refugees would cease to exist at all, much less the systems defining their explicit rights. Recalling the framework of Chapter 2, the leader of municipal Evangelical church relief efforts highlights the influence of the legal policy environment on creating channels and barriers to inclusive social participation across various areas of living:

It is a fundamental decision of German politics that we view the entire question of migration, and thus also of refugee-related flight, as a regulatory affair and thus [consider] how we build up barriers as such. "You are not allowed to do that, or that, or that either." This is not just a social matter, [...] but a regulatory one, that has to do with "the Passport." And everyone who arrives here knows how important a passport is in Germany, right? (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018)

Inclusivity becomes associated with "the passport," a legal document through which human validity is created. Refugees in the study context feel the imposition of this structure acutely, as the sense their own choices becoming conditional upon meeting specific legal requirements or definitions constructed by others. "What is the condition of being paperless like?" laments Mr. H1, a former cameraman in Iraq, as he thinks about the time required to receive his 1-year subsidiary protection status, which the family is in the lengthy process of renewing during the time of interview (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017). "We are always waiting for something to happen, and without any real answers, we are unable to do anything to move forward." A document, or lack thereof, defines his life course. Without the right papers, that is, the acknowledgment from legal structures, he feels there is little choice to do anything, completely controlled by the structures defining possibilities for his life. "I find this particularly bad, at the moment," elaborates a leader from a prominent municipal TSO, that is, Mr. H1's type of experience living out the placement into "different boxes" of life possibilities determined so heavily by asylum structures (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2016). "There's the box of, you have no chance at all, [coming from] the Balkans, for example, Then, there is the box, you have a lot of chance and get [access to] the German [integration] course immediately, and there is the box in which you are in between and still do not get German course, which is completely stupid. These boxes do not make any sense at all, as I actually think that people should be supported as soon as they arrive. Access to language and [...] support towards work [...] helps all, those who stay and those who go back."

Ultimately, advancing the journey towards legal stability affording the most explicit means for choice embodies empowerment in the legal domain, the focus of this chapter. The first section discusses how refugees in the study context are attempting to apply specific assets and capabilities towards this end. Informational assets are shown to be a key component of agency. They function as a means to understand more fully what outcomes and possibilities may be realistic and expected. As such, discretionary financial resources become critical in helping to fill information gaps through the use of translators and lawyers, who can clarify information and gather it to advance cases, potentially towards a more favorable legal outcome. Legal status in and of itself thus becomes a valuable human capital asset, as it not only opens channels to specific benefits and services, but more critically, feelings of psychological relief, security and possibility.

Based particularly on document review and the perspectives of governance actors, the second section discusses the nature of the governmental opportunity structures delineating the legal contents, procedures and execution of the asylum adjudication management process. Although the laws place case adjudication at federal levels, they oblige municipalities to manage the parameters of execution, such as overseeing movement restrictions, contextual terms for labor market entry, deportations and toleration statuses based on local determinations. These complex structures of system execution spread across national, state and municipal organizational bounds create layers of regulation that limit stability and consistency in implementation. As interviews with local governance actors and experts discuss, this has been especially acute, given the context of both frequently changing federal directives pertaining to asylum seeker and refugee benefits, but simultaneously rigid federal requirements or conditions of broader migration control that limit the city's capacity for scalable, operational flexibility. Although these opportunity structure qualities have resulted in some degree of local discretion in being able to improve conditions for refugees where federal guidelines do not prohibit it, they have also created the need for increased bureaucracy to manage what often become arbitrary or inconsistent decision-making processes advanced by individual agency workers in charge of case execution.

The final section discusses the interaction of these components in the study context to describe the degree of empowerment present in reaching desired legal ends. In the study context, within the legal domain, empowerment for refugees is more clearly possible with the most permissive legal statuses, which afford not only the clearest permissions, rights and channels to participate in key social activities, but also legal stability and related psychological confidence coming with it to feel more motivated and choose to undertake the efforts needed to pursue these activities. At the same time, interactions within these systems are still bureaucratic, as appeal processes, court involvement and frequent interactions with local bureaucrats result in informational shortfalls and act as hurdles moving forward. Intermediaries thus play a key role in overcoming these obstacles, but especially when legal status is less certain. Often acting as lobbyists to change difficult structural conditions, individual advocates (or decision-makers) to influence case outcomes or social guides to shepherd refugees more deeply towards a fuller rootedness in German society, volunteers, social workers or sympathetic government case workers are shown to be better positioned to intervene on refugees' behalf to advance political or legal aims, frequently positioned to act as refugees' communicative (linguistic) or participatory (politically procedural) voice within legal processes.

5.1 Agency and encounters within legal systems

Agency in the legal domain is comprised of the assets and capabilities refugees seek and attempt to apply towards advancing through the various components of legal asylum processes. In the study context, key elements of agency in this regard include informational assets that can be used to understand specific dynamics of an asylum case, as well as better internalize expectations and possibilities for likely outcomes. As information is highly situationally dependent, and the bounds of structure are unstable and complex (Section 5.2.1), discretionary financial assets become also increasingly important to apply towards working with relevant lawyers and translators who might be better positioned to offer information and advance legal ends (see more extensively, Section 5.3.2.1). However, for refugees in the study context, both of these resources are applied towards reaching legal status as a valuable component of agency in and of itself, as the most permissive legal statuses give way to both actual and perceived possibilities for the most freedom of choice. The sentiments of one young male Syrian refugee with a fully recognized refugee status—despite his ability to learn German and find work as an assistant social worker and interpreter for a charitable organization—embody this notion that his specific legal status, as opposed to more personal capabilities or motivations, represents an asset possibly leading to ultimate freedom more than any other:

This is liberation for me, my legal status, that is. I finally received the right to be free, to live in freedom. (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018)

5.1.1 Informational assets as a tool for understanding and planning

In the study context, information emerges as a critical component of agency, as it helps the participating refugees understand expectations throughout their asylum processes. For them, more robust information is valued and sought because it can help enhance knowledge about the nature of procedural trajectories and general life possibilities. This value of information is highlighted at all stages of the asylum process, beginning with the pre-migratory phases in which the individuals consider where they might wish to end up. Sometimes these considerations fall within realistic bounds that structures support. JY, for example, a young Iraqi Yazidi man with 2-year subsidiary status, who is of traditional university age, sees that having residency in Germany confers on somebody something “special,” warranting a person worthiness and freedom to travel and be respected in an international context:

In Iraq, we view Europe as a special place, different from other places in the Middle East. [...] With a German passport, a person could travel without a visa to over 100 countries. Maybe one day we might have that. But for us, in Iraq, to go elsewhere around is not always possible because of the papers we need. (Interview with JY, April 26, 2018).

In the case of Mr. P2, an early 30s Syrian man with a recognized refugee status, who has lived in a variety of north African countries before his family's arrival in Germany, there is a broader understanding about information pertaining to fundamental rights and freedoms that Germany promises to protect, motivating him to consider Germany as a holistically good place to end up, even though he experiences easier ways of earning money or operating without documents in other places during flight:

Mr. P2 tells me, he has worked in a lot of places, but Germany is the best. Why, I ask? He says, freedom, of course. I've worked in a lot of places; Syria, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco. And Arab countries are not free. But here, it's free. It was easier to work in Syria. A person could open a restaurant and not have to pay anything. Or just pay a rent, and that's all. Done. I can tell you, I earned a lot of money in Syria. Over €3000 a month. Things were cheap there. Maybe we spent €500 on food and things, but the rest I had in my pocket. That was easy, I say that. But freedom is very important. (Field notes, March 18, 2018)

Mrs. M1, a Kurdish Syrian housewife with four children, whose family has a 1-year subsidiary status, similarly considers structural conditions in a broad way. In Turkey, where she lives without documents prior to Germany, her husband and young teenage son must work in a garment factory. Her family lives in a dingy area with questionable electricity and limited ability to keep perishable food. She compares her previous experiences to current ones in Germany, and even despite her current dissatisfactions, she internalizes holistic information about the value in coming to Germany, due to its potential for support positioning:

Mrs. M1 thinks Germany has been helpful to her at a high level. She says, "The Arab (countries) do not help. For example, no Saudi, no Qatar, no Jordan. Lebanon helps a little. Turkey helps a little. It has a lot, but not everything for us. [...] Germany helps us." (Field notes, July 31, 2017)

At the same time, a lack of information or incomplete information before fleeing can contribute to possible false expectations or misunderstandings in what Germany can or cannot provide in terms of more specific measures of support or explicit restrictions on activities for certain groups of individuals in certain circumstances. An economist studying refugee labor market integration explains at a broader level:

There are certainly many refugees who have realistic expectations. But we heard a lot about this in 2015, 2016, that in some of the refugee countries of origin, there must have been very unfortunate propaganda that smugglers were spreading, that refugees in Germany are given a house and a car very quickly, something of the sort. So, there are now refugees who come to Germany with very high expectations, that they will have a very good, or much more prominent social status here, that they imagine how they will immediately have a very good job to reach this [status]. As I said, that certainly doesn't apply to everyone. There are many who have just simply fled, who flee from very problematic [situations] and then arrive here with few expectations and simply see how they might make their own live. But there is still [...] this strange propaganda that has happened and [...] strange expectations. (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018)

Many of those consulting or assisting refugees in the TSO-context, including the young social work assistant coming to Germany originally as a refugee himself, share or describe similar sentiments as they apply broadly to other refugees they encounter. "For a lot of people, it's like a vacation in Germany. Even sometimes for the people who are from Syria," he explains, because rote conditions of living or suffering are simply unlike what they previously experienced, and these situations of welfare provisioning are simply ones that Germany has "given" and refugees have "accepted" in terms of using them (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018). They may convey these perceptions to their families back home, that they are at least somewhat (objectively, although not relatively) better off, which can lead to notions that all elements of life will obligatorily be better in Germany, as another Red Cross worker explains in a general sense, based on her professional experiences:

I think there is a portion of misguided refugees because [there are...] wrong impressions in home countries. Yes, you come to Germany, then somebody cares for you completely, you get an apartment, you get a job, the children can go to school, you are taken care of, it's a welfare state. It has not been taught that, when you arrive, there is a certain status you must work towards. (Interview with volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018)

More critically, however, various experts stress the role that information plays in terms of refugees being able to better assess, construct and envision life possibilities upon arrival, as the asylum procedure advances and when outcomes are received:

They should also see a specific prospect for themselves. That is, that they know what the next step is and that it can be better. As long as they do not know how to proceed, there is a great deal of uncertainty and that inhibits them. [...] It is just very important to know that there is a prospect for me in Germany, as well as prospects for life with my family together, for a career start; these are the wishes that everyone has. (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017)

Incorrect information about these possibilities before migration may contribute to frustration, anger or depression when they are not reached. But beyond merely dashing initial visions of grandeur, the reality of living through an adjudication process which is highly opaque, slow and non-communicative leads to more fundamental conditions of psychological trouble and instability. Especially in emergency shelters, stays of which have typically stretched out far longer than stipulated by theoretical local ordinances and plans, "people really did not know what would happen to them, what would come next," as a matter of course (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018). Given the lack of swiftness and clarity, as a deportation officer from the local Foreigners' Authority explains, refugees must contend with feeling completely uninformed about what is or can transpire next in reality.

A [big] aspect is, from my daily experience, fast procedures. I believe that nothing is more difficult than sitting in such a mass, in such a mass housing, being condemned to doing nothing and not knowing what will happen to yourself, right? Waiting three years until finally a decision has been made, that is for many, many simply extremely unsatisfactory, yes? [...] In cases where it is clear from the outset that there is no prospect of staying here, there must also be fast action, right? You have to be informed very quickly, that you have no perspective here, and we have to ensure that we regulate your departure procedure as humanely as possible. [...] One should quickly know that, because the more time passes, the more stuck in the situation you become. (Interview with division leader, residence permit cessation, municipal Foreigners' Authority, November 22, 2017).

Asylum structures even before status determine early access rights to certain services (Appendices D and E); there are the aforementioned "boxes," or countries of origin that have been associated with higher and lower probabilities to result in protection statuses. Already from their time of arrival, because of these structures, individuals arriving from these so-called lower-probability countries are less likely to receive favorable outcomes, but are simply more clearly cut off from access to integration courses, freedom of movement and labor market entry. Various experts refer to individuals in these predicaments as having "no chances" or "absolutely no possibilities" in a long-term sense for moving forward, but more problematic is the fact that "they simply are not aware of [this]" (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017). As they wait, with little other information or feedback, they may attempt ways to establish themselves or simply become more ingrained in their surroundings over time, which becomes more difficult to undo logistically if and when a negative outcome is finally delivered.

At the same time, broad information about asylum structures, legal outcomes and general legal possibilities can only go so far in being useful. A municipal ombudsperson reflects on experiences in advising local refugees how to make certain types of complaints through municipal channels, "I do not think one should ever make the claim that there could be an all-encompassing knowledge and complete

comprehension,” but “refugees can grapple with these circumstances and understand their parts in their cases” (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017). A Red Cross social worker confirms that there is an acute need to understand more information at an individual level, what is permissible and possible for an individual to pursue:

What interests you most is your own case. So, a refugee is not necessarily interested in how many thousands are currently in Cologne or in Germany, but actually, what about my procedure? Why did I only get subsidiary protection now, although I presumably have a right to something else. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018)

The need for individual information is apparent as the participating refugees themselves frequently question why things are the way they are from legal perspectives as they traverse legal systems. All too common are the general rhetorical questions of, why a toleration status? Why only 1-year and not 3-year papers? Why don't I receive this or that benefit? Why must I wait so long? There is frequently difficulty, frustration and confusion in considering the outcomes or trajectory of one's own case, simply because there is no information as to how or why it has turned out the way it has. Mrs. M1 explains that it is difficult for her to process the answers to these questions because there is not a way to find readily available answers:

Do you have papers or not? What are your [legal] problems with papers? There are already other problems, it is hard to talk about these ones. I have no idea why some people have papers and others not. Some people from Syria don't get papers. Other people get three years. I have one year. (Field notes, March 1, 2018)

Aside from creating difficulties in understanding broader restrictions or permissions in shaping life bounds, the lack of information can also create difficulties for individuals knowing where to turn to for help working through these issues. Information plays a key role in better understanding what is offered by whom and for whom. “It is very important for the refugees to be informed at an early stage about what to expect here [at the TSO],” explains a program consultant, “In terms of where they can connect and what we can do less of” (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, December 7, 2017). But even here, social workers and TSO actors within these structures of support frequently describe a lack of knowledge about what services they offer. Common are sentiments such as, there are so many in Cologne, there are so many special interest groups, there are so many diverse offerings, it is hard to know who is in the best position to help. Similarly, as the value of services is frequently spread by word of mouth—either via workers to refugees or refugees reporting to each other about how they were helped—many TSO actors admit to difficulties in more reliably finding ways to channel information in a more scalable manner to reach more relevant refugee clients. Often, according to one volunteer leader, refugee clients go through channels of social workers in shelters or municipal consulting points, further creating intermediary structures that become gatekeepers of information:

These are the classic questions. It is a fact that there are counseling centers that could be used, but I think most refugees do not know about them. And if there is not some hinge in between, well, there's the refugee, the volunteer, and there's the help center—if there's not a volunteer, who can say, now we go to Diakonie or to this refugee council for advice, or to this consumer protection center if there are problems with a mobile phone contract—if there is nobody who knows about this particular institution for help, then that is problematic for the refugee. (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018)

As an understandable response, in the absence of easier ways to understand and in the presence of so much situational diversity, the biggest informational struggles for the refugees in the study often come from attempting to relate or reconcile their own experiences with those of others as logical reference points

simply due to proximity. Although residents in the field site shelters often experience difficulties relating to one another more deeply (Chapter 7, Section 7.1.2), they see broad similarities in terms of sharing origin countries, past stories of trauma, situations of single parenthood or burdens of physical and mental disease. Across conversations in daily shelter interactions and interviews, they describe such sentiments. They see another shelter resident, also from a nearby village in their conflict-laden country, who not only receives a more favorable status but did so more quickly as their own families still wait. They see a roommate who also has a child with a European boyfriend, whose child-related residence permit was processed, while they must scrounge for money to arbitrate their own claims. They see someone in the bunk across the way who drinks, who picks fights, who keeps contraband and gets transferred to a private room in a private shelter, while they follow the rules and yet still languish in the shared communal hall for months longer. Piecing together the limited information from what they know of their own cases, along with their incomplete observations of others, they may conceptualize ideas of rights they ought to have or outcomes they ought to receive, correctly or incorrectly. As described at the beginning of this chapter, E1, a single mother with three children from Cameroon, a country with no particularly “high” prospect to result in a positive case, discusses this notion frequently as an individual whose asylum case status remains somewhat uncertain:

She says she has been stressed because two other black girls, one from Nigeria and one from Ghana, have recently had their asylum claims denied. [...] She said her friend arrived here when she was about 4 months pregnant [by a partner with an EU passport] and the baby is 5 months now, so it has been about 9 to 10 months waiting for this decision to come. The friend does not know what she will do. She wants to pay a lawyer to file an appeal, but the lawyer wants to charge about €1000. The friend does not know if the boyfriend can help with the money because the boyfriend has regular bills to pay. It is unclear to [both of them] why the application would be denied if the woman had a baby who could obtain an EU passport. But, she feels fear and stress because of these experiences of her friends. She sees her own situation in them and does not know why they were denied. So, it makes her wonder if she will also be denied [...] She says she is not so sure [what happens with a rejection]. She says there is the ability to appeal, but she doesn't know how long people have to stay. She thinks they just have to go immediately. She says in a previous shelter she lived in, she saw some “big strong guys come in at 3 AM” to take a family away and bring them to the airport. “They had only an hour to pack their things. I am not sure where they go.” (Field notes, August 2, 2017).

She sees herself in the cases of her friends from similar countries in Africa, wondering if their own outcomes might apply to her. She feels fearful and confused, placing herself in the situation of what to do when the “big strong guys” come for her without warning. Perhaps, in reality, the specifics of her case might not warrant such worry, or clarification might provide a more obvious way to work through these concerns. But money is tight, the social workers at the emergency shelter where she lives at the time are overburdened, and her status as an asylum seeker (at the time of conversation) relegates her to more limited opportunities for legal consulting at TSOs. Her information, then, comes from sources available to her in her own sphere; despite the value that more robust information would offer, it is difficult to come by.

5.1.2 Financial resources for information and case support

Given the complexity, but high value, of information, a highly desired asset in the study context comes forth as the possibility to reconcile this information more productively. A municipal police officer experienced in dealing with a variety of shelter-based altercations and crimes points out that there should be a possibility for improving legal information and clarity in this general sense, perhaps through streamlining of legal texts or the creation of simplified supplementary resources that might be discussed between refugees and social workers:

In any case, I would try to make [laws] as clear as possible such that everybody can understand them. Not in the form of a variety of laws and subsidiary laws, but rather, in some type of clarification somewhere to summarize clearly in a few paragraphs. There is a risk that this might not be applicable to maybe a very small percentage of people

in a specific gray area, but I would try to do so [simplify] by making it easier to quote from the law, making it clearer that there is straightforwardness. I think there would be greater understanding for a person knowing what is going on. And here, laws, if I do not understand German, then what is here in the law—what is in these sets of boxes, if that commentary comes from legal scholars, that would just be too much. You would really have to crawl out of that muck. (Interview with municipal police officer, March 8, 2018)

But even as the police officer acknowledges, much law is specific to a particular case. There are gray areas of law or cases that are difficult to evaluate, but in the context of asylum law, these are more prolific than he might consider from his perspective as an individual dealing with crime and arrests. While there is likely a general benefit that could come from providing clearer knowledge at a high level, building on the previous discussion on the value of individual information, a better understanding of the complexities of individual situations is more necessary. A TSO leader underscores this sentiment:

And that's the problem, foreigners' law is super complex and complicated. In other words, if I have five cases of people from Syria or Iraq or Nigeria, for instance, I have five different stories, and each one is different. So, for example, one may have a residence permit because of HIV, the other because of kidney disease, the third because of asylum and the fourth because there is a child. So, there are already five people with five different stories with me, general information gets them nowhere. (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2018)

Sensibly, a solution, as both experts and refugees report, is to pursue help from individuals better positioned to reach these ends, namely lawyers, who can explain and possibly advocate in more relevant ways. Although social workers or general counseling centers for refugees can provide broad psychological support, a venue for discussion or a sympathetic ear, they are not necessarily best positioned to advance solutions to specific informational needs and questions, as a TSO leader and social worker explain:

For the details, I think, you must actually go to a lawyer or to a counseling center because they are too many different things that you cannot account for [in a general support context], but you can only provide [broad] information. (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2018)

Certain professionals have a different mission than the social services, such as the Refugee Council or lawyers specializing in asylum law, who are essential components. In my opinion, for refugees, there is always the greatest interest in their own cases, and of course that can only be handled individually, best by a professional. One better go to a lawyer for that. We can talk about basic refugee issues, and the refugees can talk to us. But [legal help] is not our main task, nor the task of a neighbor, it is more relevant and goes more smoothly to see a lawyer. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018)

Specifically tailored legal support “helps to have a better understanding of the structures and processes [...] that can be good for a person in that situation, to understand why some decisions have been made and not just to get the explanation that it just is the way it is and must be lived with.” (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017). But access to this personalized information and understanding comes at a cost. “People must often pay for translators and lawyers, [...] especially when deportations are pending or certain statuses are not as they would like,” confirms a TSO service coordinator (Interview with senior volunteer and services coordinator, Diakonie Michaelshoven, January 22, 2018). Legal services can be expensive, as public legal aid does not always adequately cover costs to take on cases, and they are mandatory to possess if advancing to second-stage decision appeals (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 29)

Refugees in the study context share their experiences regarding the necessity and difficulty of costs. Living at the same shelter, P1 and C3, young single-mother asylum seekers (at the time of interview) from Nigeria and Ghana respectively, both struggle with finances on the small stipends they receive (see Chapter 6). They both discuss their feelings on not having enough money. “How long can I be expected to survive

with so little?” asks P1. “It is not enough to live on” (Interview with C3 and P1, September 18, 2017). This financial struggle is particularly acute when P1 has troubles reconciling why a childcare supplement she used to receive suddenly does not appear in her monthly allotment. She says she should be able to talk to a lawyer about not receiving the proper amount she thinks she is entitled to, but she doesn’t know how she might pay for it (Interview with C3 and P1, September 18, 2017). For UO, a young male from Pakistan who formerly works as a military translator, budgeting the cost of a lawyer to work through his asylum application and subsequent denial is a burden in his daily life, but he feels there was no way to avoid it:

He explains, the waiting has been exceptionally difficult because he already used about €500 of his own money to pay a lawyer, and he has doubts that this money was well spent. He says the lawyer was supposed to help him with tips for the [asylum] interview, but did not really coach him very well. It was a financial burden to pay €280 up front and then another €50 per month from there, but he had heard from another refugee friend that a lawyer could help avoid a negative decision. So, he considered it critical to try to pay for a lawyer to get a positive result. (Interview with UO, October 17, 2017)

Echoing the Diakonie leader in municipal migration services who describes five different refugees each with five different legal stories (p. 110), most conversations with refugees bring up these elements of their stories, underscoring the necessity of legal help despite their associated costs. VM, a young male Bangladeshi with a Bachelor’s degree in accounting doing an apprenticeship at an IT firm, has a lawyer to appeal his asylum denial, given his particular circumstance as an educated individual currently doing a training program. VM “has learned from his lawyer, as well as a judge he speaks to, that having training slot may not necessarily affect the outcome of the appeal itself, but [...] that having it will prevent him from getting deported” (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017). For Family T2, ethnic Kurds living in Turkey before coming to Germany, their citizenship status as Turks makes their ethnic persecution as Kurds difficult to recognize. Mrs. M1, a Kurdish Syrian whose family has a subsidiary protection status and who has befriended Mrs. T2, explains to me as her translator, that “Turkey is like Europe, so they have no chance for a residence permit. [...] She works with a person [...] to help her with the papers to get a permit. But she is waiting now, waiting, waiting” (Field notes, March 1, 2018). A3, a private-practice owning lawyer in Syria, utilizes a lawyer to ensure she can get a 3-year refugee status to increase her chances of being able to bring her teenage son to Germany, as he remains abroad. “You can’t have or do anything without these papers,” she says (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018). D1, a late-50s disabled widow from Albania living with her two adult children, must work with a lawyer to provide specific health certificates and testaments to her disabilities, to support her ongoing toleration status renewal (Interview with D1, October 17, 2017). Her adult children, avoiding deportation through positions within training programs, are never without the folders full of their legal documents, which they can procure immediately when talking about them.

In the study context, financial assets for and connections to lawyers are not the only costs in this regard. Translators are similarly needed frequently in legal or governmental contexts and must be paid for independently. Often unavailable at short notice or eager to exploit refugees, translators can be costly and unreliable. E1, the Cameroonian single mother, for example, describes needing a last-minute translator to attend an appointment related to some documents for her files. After asking some others in the shelter for recommendations, she calls one and finds out he would charge almost €100 to attend her appointment. Not only does E1 consider this too much money, but she hears from another person in the shelter that this translator worked with another African asylum seeker, whose claim was ultimately unsuccessful. Ultimately, E1 feels her recourse is to ask the shelter social workers to try to postpone the appointment until she can a translator she can afford, although appointment deferral happens only with an office worker’s discretion (Field notes, August 2, 2017). Over time, as E1 continues to deal with issues extending her toleration status that eventually comes, she explains to me that appointments are “too complicated to understand without a translator,” making them necessary, in addition to the varying levels of willingness of city employees to

speak English. “To be fair,” she acknowledges, “It is their job to speak German, actually” (Field notes, February 8, 2018). Mr. and Mrs. M1, the Syrian Kurds with only 1-year subsidiary statuses, also describe the ongoing needs and costs for translators and lawyers:

Mr. M1 explains, we just got this from our lawyer. He shows me a packet of papers. He says, “We had 1-year papers, and we wanted 3-year papers. So, we met with this lawyer. We paid about €150, but we met with him once, then we have just been waiting.” [...] He and his wife confirm, yes, [they have spoken] just once, then they spend the rest of the time waiting.

“Does the lawyer speak Kurdish,” I ask?

He says, “No we had to pay for a translator ourselves.” [...]

Mrs. M1 says, “The woman who came with you before [the volunteer translator I used during our interview]? She came with us to an appointment once and didn't charge money. But sometimes the others do.”

Mr. M1 says, “I have about four in my phone and contact them when I need to. If they are bad, then I move to the next one.” (Field notes, May 5, 2018)

They feel the need for support to attempt to advance specific issues and spend limited money towards these ends, but they still question if their actions here will be effective, especially as they continue to wait for resolutions that are difficult to otherwise obtain.

5.1.3 Legal status as a human capital and psychological asset

As such, it is clear that the individuals in the study context understandably desire a way forward towards legal outcomes that are more favorable. There is the consistent sentiment of having what they often describe as “the right papers,” usually referring to 3-year papers, that is, the formal recognized refugee status that confers full refugee recognition through either the constitution or the Geneva Convention (Section 5.2.1.2 explains statuses in greater detail). Although there is often a basic level of appreciation to stay in Germany more generally, consternation is frequently described without the most robust legal statuses, especially for those individuals renewing more precarious statuses, sometimes for years on end. Often attempting to take measures to appear more stable and make their cases seem more favorable to the local decision officials, they still find themselves experiencing roadblocks towards residential stability and employment that might add to possibilities for change. In a formal interview for *Nevipe*, a local Roma-interest journal composed by the advocacy organization Rom e.V., one Roma man (living multiple years at one of the fieldwork shelters, where I meet his family) explains this predicament his family experiences, after migrating in the wake of Yugoslav, ethnic-based conflict in 1997 from Montenegro. Having lived in Germany over 20 years on a toleration status, moving in and out of temporary work situations, apartments and shelters, they have attempted to rectify their legal status to improve their overall possibilities for life stability, with much effort and many resources, but also with little success:

During that time, I had no right to work! I fought with my lawyer to get a work permit for six years. I didn't want to then, and now too, I don't want to make a living from the state, I want to support my family with my own work. Yes, after six years of struggle. Then I was employed by a scaffolding company for eight months, but because of the high risk of accidents (my wife had already had more children), my employer once kindly said to me: “You are the father of seven children, if you had an accident at work, I would have to close the company!” The next day, I was back at the unemployment office. Then I worked in a bakery facility. [...] I thought my family would finally get a [residence] permit because I work! But my clerk at the immigration office was very nervous. [...] Why? I have no idea. Then she said that even if I worked another twenty years, I would not get a residence permit! My children went to school, I had a job, we had a private apartment, but still we have no right to stay! Why? [...] I wanted to keep fighting. I have obtained a certificate from the IHK. But I keep looking for a work permit. I will get it when a company wants to hire me, but now I have little tolerance for that. That is the vicious cycle [*Teufelskreis*]. (Schmitz & Sejdović, 2017, p. 9–11)

This vicious cycle is particularly apparent with temporary toleration statuses, as experts also discuss (Interview with division leader, residence permit cessation, municipal Foreigners' Authority, November 22, 2017). Toleration is a "strange, mixed situation" (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018) that does not amount of a formal form of protection; simply an exception to delay deportation for a period of time, which must be renewed at frequent intervals (Section 5.2.1.2; Appendix D). Without a more robust legal status to support participation in regularized channels of social life (such as taking up legal work or finding private housing), although deportation might not be able to be carried out "as a matter of fact,"⁸² individuals may instead be relegated to partake in "social processes that are naturally not desirable" (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018). Gathered across various interviews with social workers and TSO consultants in particular, these activities can include participating in (possibly exploitative) under-the-table or black-market work, requiring shelter accommodation for years, refusing to learn German, being reluctant to send children to school, encouraging teenage marriage and pregnancy or simply not feeling compelled to do much of anything, given that very little may be possible anyway. As a Red Cross social worker at one shelter reports, it is often families with these long-term toleration statuses and little prospects for realistic means of productivity who create the most difficulties in the social dynamics of shelter spaces; they are often the ones have issues with drunkenness or fighting, express less consideration for other shelter residents, take worse care of their shelter spaces and who appear to feel thoroughly unmotivated (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018).

In the study context, legal status in and of itself thus becomes an obvious asset of human and psychological capital. As a human capital tool to open doors towards stability and greater possibilities for moving on, it offers clearer possibility to avoid the aforementioned vicious cycle of only being able to obtain a favorable legal status through demonstrating integration success, but only being able to reach integration success when having a favorable legal status (Interview with leader and political advocate, Roma charity organization, January 12, 2018). It is obvious, explains a social worker, that:

A lot comes from having 3-year papers. With those, you can immediately work and then you are obligated to attend an integration course. Other people, who don't have a recognition—with that, you would need to get an approval for work. Sometimes this approval comes, sometimes it doesn't. And honestly, I have no idea what the criteria even are or why sometimes the answer is yes and why it is sometimes no. Sometimes, people have a complete prohibition against work and there is no way around that. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018).

A favorable legal status confers not only an asset of human capital to apply in stable pursuits of employment, learning or housing searches, but additional psychological assets of hope, strength and purpose to feel motivated to pursue other challenges in moving forward. For C3, the Ghanaian single-mother asylum seeker, fighting through a rejection and various permutations of residency possibilities ultimately adjudicated through her child (born to a father with an EU passport), obtaining the final documents mean she can feel better about life in Germany. When following up with her in the midst of this process a few months after our interview, she tells me, "I guess I feel a little better. But, maybe it will be even better when the *Aufenthalt* [residence permit] comes, and I can do a German course" (Field notes, April 26, 2018). For her, residency documents mean permission to feel there is hope to move forward. Her friend, P1, shares the same sentiment, longing for both the situational (i.e, school, work, childcare) and psychological (positive aspirations) benefits that come with a status. She explains, "I am so excited to be done with this waiting. I just want the wait to be over, and I can go take my German course, go to school, do a training program. I just want to work. I am ready. I will really be ready when my son can get a kindergarten spot! I look forward to this" (Interview with P1 and C3, March 18, 2017).

⁸² For many with long-term toleration statuses, deportation cannot be carried out because their former states of residence no longer exist (ex., Yugoslavia).

The son of Mr. SM, a man in his young 20s who had helped his father with restaurants and various business endeavors in Syria and is now attending a technical education college in Cologne, explains how the final adjudication of his and his parents' formal refugee recognition provides relief and a more defined confidence that his pursuits to better himself are worthwhile and productive:

He says, he waited about three months for the renewal [of his prior 1-year status], and it just came back within the last few days. He is feeling relieved to have 3-year recognition now. He says, earlier, I was wondering how it would go. My school course was at least two years, but I only had a 1-year status. Now, with 3-year papers, I think I can get the long-term papers [*i.e.*, *Niederlassungserlaubnis*] after five years because I will have school, German and hopefully a job at that point. (Field notes, March 16, 2018)

But even so, the participating refugees also discuss how legal status in and of itself is not any type of guarantee of calm or confidence. As A3, the Syrian lawyer with a full refugee status, explains her own struggles with a lack of hope that she might ever be able to do something at the intellectual level of law again, she elucidates other types of complications experienced by her family members, also holding refugee status. An elderly relative has a favorable status, but is subject to the same legal requirements of participation in integration measures despite personal circumstances that might make this less relevant:

“On the other end, the mother of my brother’s wife. She is so old. 62? 65? She is so ill with heart problems. Everything is problematic with her health. But you know, the Job Center still forced her to go to a German course! They said, go to a course or get a job. She had no choice.”

I say, “Let me see if I understand. She can’t get a job without a course, but can’t reliably do a course because she is old, and even if she does the course, she cannot get a job because she is too old for a training program.”

She looks at me straight and says, “Yes, exactly. Really. She could not even see the board! She would tell me, I cannot even see, what do I do? Here, it’s really something else. You truly have no choice. I always ask, why would Germany speak to people with such welcome, say, come here, welcome. But then, why would they say, well, in fact, you must make this and this.” (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018)

In the study context, although informational assets, legal support and legal status as a human capital and psychological tool demonstrate great value as elements of agency, none are assurance that a way forward is clear or can easily be pursued. Information, although it builds planning capabilities and fosters a sense of hope, can also be false, misleading or difficult to obtain, even with the help of support, when it is complex and highly situationally dependent, or similarly dependent on the qualities of the supporting lawyer or translator. Discretionary finances are not easy to come by (Chapter 6), sometimes limiting access to quality support or even support at all. A favorable status, when reached, can open specific channels for social participation and increase aspirations and motivation accordingly. But the interplays of structure continue to build and also deconstruct various barriers shaping the application of choice towards this end.

5.2 Legal governmental institutional structures and limitations

In the legal domain, the specific political- legal systems that most influence refugees' agency, legal lives and goals are those regulating the asylum procedure, along with the implications of its status outcomes. Together, these structures determine what types of residency rights (such as length of stay, appeal time frames or family reunification) are afforded, along with access options to support structures such as freedom of movement, language courses, vocational training programs or labor market access. During the influx years, the latter have often been further regulated during the asylum adjudication period, classifying access to certain support structures via measures of likelihood that a successful claim can be processed. These change and evaluation systems are attempting to deal with application processing in a way that can better take advantage of often limited executional resources. The documentary and interview evidence shows, on

the one hand, that some of this change has allowed for flexibility in local positioning to fill critical needs gaps and adjust more optimally to manage local manifestations of the asylum process (in line with Aumüller et al., 2015 and Schammann & Kühn, 2017, for example). But on the other hand, this has also created opportunity structure qualities involving general instability occurring at various organizational levels, the need for shorter-term emergency planning in local contexts and additional layers of uncertainty via discretion and bureaucracy in administration, all of which contribute to procedural opacity in terms of consistency and understanding from the perspectives of the refugee participants.

5.2.1 Evolving bounds of asylum structures

At an international level, Germany is party to the Refugee Convention, as well as the Common European Asylum System. In one way, being bound to the adherence to these international structures has encouraged Germany to eliminate or streamline certain policy elements from the late 1990s and early 2000s that were explicitly more restrictive than they have been most recently (Ette, 2017; Liedtke, 2016, p. 492). Similarly, Germany has had a chance to demonstrate an applied commitment to processing and managing the objectively highest number of applications in Europe, accepting provisioning challenges and encouraging other EU nations by example to do more. At the same time, as Chapter 3 discusses, the general migration ethos of the post-war years has both supported and discouraged the general presence of migrants in Germany, offering some rights and benefits, but also structurally denying clearer, more holistic positioning within German society (Borkert & Bosswick, 2007). In the recent refugee context, this has similarly been advanced through frequently changing policy frameworks which have become more permissive in some manners but more restrictive in others, according to literature, documentary and interview evidence.

5.2.1.1 The asylum procedure

As discussed in Chapter 3, the opening of the German borders and temporary suspension of Dublin procedures in 2015 represented a culminating turn from prior asylum structures in the 1990s, continuing change that had occurred in the early 2000s. The 1993 Asylum Compromise curtailed straightforward possibilities to file asylum claims in Germany, due to the nature of transit routes into Germany and corresponding restrictions on how asylum applications had to be filed (Liedtke, 2016): namely, these included the requirement to file an application in the first safe country of arrival (although Germany is surrounded by safe countries per AsylVfg, Section 26a) and the possibility of being subject to an accelerated airport asylum procedure allowing for possible immediate rejection of an application based on the presumption of transit through safe countries. Numbers of asylum claims were thus drastically reduced into the early 2000s (Rietig & Müller, 2016). As various economic and political triggers prompted inquiry into these reductions and structures, the government formally departed from prior more exclusionary stances in its 2001 investigative migration report, declaring that “Germany needs immigrants” (BMI, 2001, p. 11).

Although not without debate, this turning point ultimately led to a broad overhaul of migration policy in 2005, including modifications to AufenthaltG, which simplified long-term permanent residency statuses, placed more concentrated authority to manage migration outcomes at the level of the local Foreigners’ Authority and introduced integration concepts and measures as a two-way feedback process between host and migrant (Law Library of Congress, 2020; Rietig & Müller, 2016). This shift in migration climate correspondingly supported change in asylum procedures happening in parallel. Two EU directives, the 2004 EU Qualifications Directive and 2011 EU Asylum Procedures Directive, required Germany to alter restrictions imposed in the Asylum Compromise (Rietig & Müller, 2016). Those granted refugee status under the refugee convention were to have the same rights as those under national law. Additionally, a “subsidiary protection” status was introduced for asylum seekers unable to receive a full protection status, but unable to be returned due to threats of death or torture that were nonetheless present.

As Heckmann (2016) argues, these events of 2005 prompted specific conditions in the following decade that contributed to the willingness to open the borders in August 2015. Primarily, these conditions were a growth-oriented macroeconomic climate; a positive, multi-sector (i.e., political, media, business academic, etc.) consensus on the benefits of migration that were also linked to economic strength (also emphasized by Trauner & Turton, 2017) and continued modifications to make migration law more favorable to certain groups (for example, the promotion of high-skilled migration in line with the EU Blue Card Directive in 2012). At the culminating opening of borders, asylum seekers with unregistered claims in transit countries were permitted to file applications in Germany, driving the inflows that in turn instigated a new policy climate of change with higher degrees of uncertainty across various areas of the asylum process.

Ultimately, the structures of the asylum adjudication process are the primary legal governance component of the asylum experience, as they dictate the definitions bounding it. As it was during the fieldwork period (and still remains), the German asylum-seeking process—distinct from programs of humanitarian resettlement—is fairly complex in its components and administration. It is federally governed by AsylVfG and carried out by BAMF at regionally based offices (BAMF, 2016c). BAMF is responsible for adjudicating cases and issuing legal status. The law does not set a time limit for adjudication, but BAMF must provide an estimate of time upon individual request if no decision has been made within 6 months (AsylG, Section 24.4). Since 2016, as a response to better manage high caseloads, regional offices have been able to set their own processes and priorities to adjust to local situational needs. Once cases are decided, 52 administrative courts, distributed across the country, can revoke, revise or confirm these BAMF decisions. In line with these national bounds, immigration and foreigners’ authorities in states and localities are responsible for administering the follow-on processes of these outcomes, namely, enforcing local travel and residence standards, administering benefits, implementing integration measures and managing deportations. Figure 11 provides a schematic of the steps in the standard asylum application process.

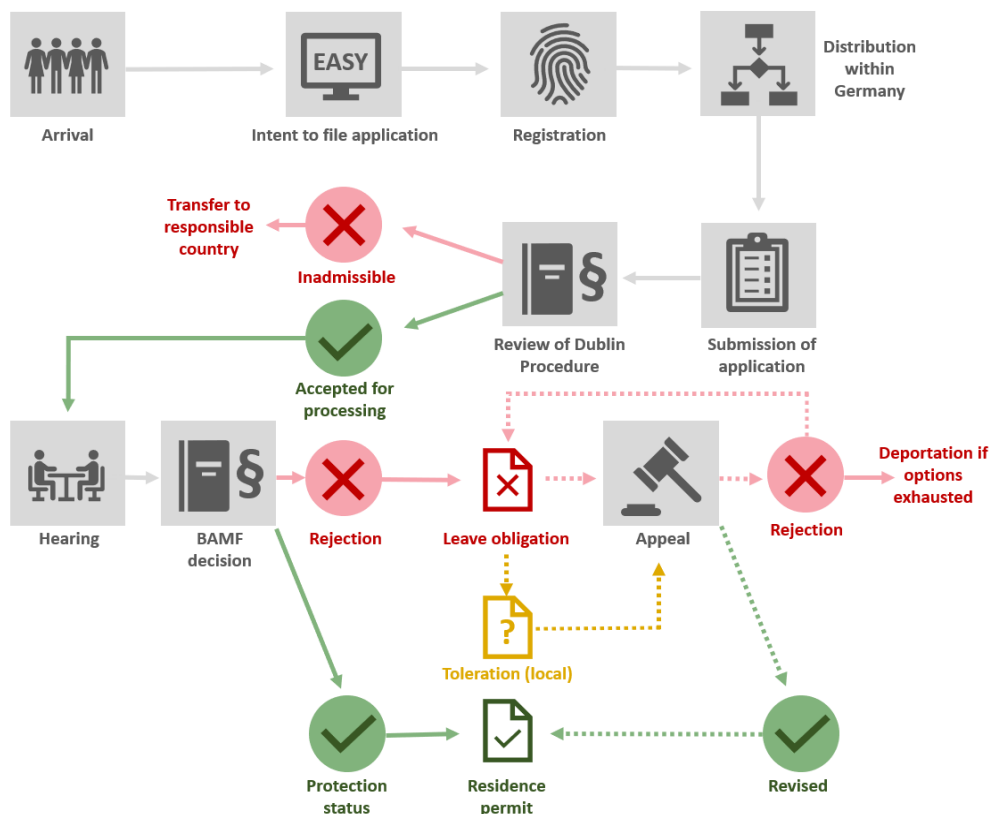


Figure 11. Schematic of the asylum process. Author illustration based on Hanewinkel (2016) and BAMF (2016b).

The process begins with individuals expressing an intent to file an application for asylum, which must be done through a public authority (ex., a BAMF office, reception facility, Foreigners' Authority or police station). The authority then enters the intent as an entry into the EASY (Initial Distribution of Asylum-Seekers, *Erstverteilung der Asylbegehrenden*) system, a database which provides "an initial benchmark for federal and regional authorities," helping them estimate the numbers of asylum seekers requiring accommodation and also arranging their distribution across the states in accordance with the federal quota system⁸³ (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*) (Grote, 2018, p. 15). At this point, individuals are legally known as *Asylsuchende* (literally, asylum seeker), and they receive a provisional proof of arrival document (*Ankunftsnachweis*). When their federal quota-driven sorting has been completed, asylum seekers are assigned to an initial reception facility in a specific state. It is within this state they will be required to live and pursue their asylum application. In this matter of assignment, they have no practical or legal choice. Although petitions to be moved to specific areas for compelling reasons (ex., presence of a hospital to treat a specific medical condition) may be individually considered, they are rarely executed (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 72). As a state with a high population and high GDP, NRW has been given the highest asylum seeker quota during the influx years, generally set to receive around 20–21% of the country's asylum seekers (Kalkmann, 2017, 2019). Actual reception figures have been closer to 24–27% (BAMF, 2016a, 2017a, 2018a).

Asylum seekers are sent to one of five reception facilities within NRW, in which formal identification processes and a health examination take place, along with the official registration of the asylum claim. After the official application has been filed, individuals are then legally referred to as *Asylantragstellende* (literally, asylum applicant). They also receive a permission to reside status (*Aufenthalts gestattet*) that authorizes their stay in Germany until their claims are adjudicated. From here, they can be moved to group accommodations or other emergency shelters, from where they are eventually further distributed to municipalities (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015). Between 2015 and 2018, both minimum and maximum periods of time to be spent in these initial reception facilities has fluctuated and ranged anywhere from 3, 6, 18 and 24 months at federal and NRW levels (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018; Kalkmann, 2019). In Cologne's context, the overarching theme has been frequently changing limits, as well as the ignoring of time limits in certain types of provisional shelters that have been caused by the circumstance of simply having nowhere to house people (Faigle, 2015; Leßke, Singfield, & Blasius, 2019; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017).

After the stage of personal data collection and identity verification at claim registration, the adjudication process first involves an examination in accordance with Dublin procedures to confirm if an application should be processed elsewhere. Of almost 55,000 requests to transfer cases out of Germany in 2018, only around 9,200 were carried out, primarily being sent back to Italy (2,800) (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 30). About 14.5% of these transfers were successfully appealed (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 38). If the claim is processed in Germany, the next steps are a personal interview with a claims worker and gathering of additional information if necessary. BAMF identifies the interview as "the applicant's most important appointment" within the procedure (BAMF, 2016c, p. 16). An interpreter is provided when needed, and either a lawyer or representative from UNHCR may attend. According to BAMF, "the objective of the interviews is to learn of the individual reasons for flight, to obtain more information and to resolve contradictions. To this end, the [BAMF application] decision makers are familiar with the circumstances prevailing in the applicants' countries of origin" (BAMF, 2016c, p. 16). Statements should be translated back to applicants before they attest to them. Once this information is documented, BAMF case workers issue a decision based on guidelines of AsylG. As discussed in Chapter 3, the length of time until this decision has consistently languished months and, in some cases, years (Table 10).

⁸³ The quota system is based formally on indicators of state population and tax revenue (AsylG, Section 45). Additionally, distribution may also be based on center capacity, as well as potential regional expertise in handling specific types of cases from certain countries (Kalkmann, 2019).

Asylum seekers from specific origin countries have been subject to different possibilities for application processing, as well as different types of permissions and restrictions during this process (Appendices D and E). In October 2015, the Asylum Procedures Acceleration Act (sometimes referred to as Asylum Package II, *Asylverfahrensbeschleunigungsgesetz, AsylVfBeschIG*) (Grote, 2018) built a concept of clustering application processing and some benefits access into categories of countries highly likely to produce protection statuses (>50% positive adjudications) as opposed to highly unlikely (<20% positive adjudications) (BAMF, 2016c, p. 29). High-likelihood countries began as Eritrea, Iran, Iraq and Syria, with Somalia being added in 2016 (Brücker, Jaschke, & Kosyakova, 2019). A group of unclear prospects (belonging to no other identified group) was added in May 2016 (Grote, 2018). In December 2015, BAMF designated 23 out of 38 branch offices as arrival centers that could streamline and directly process asylum cases (i.e., personal data documentation, medical exams, application registration, interview and final decision) within a few days' time based on these clusters (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 21). Presumably, this clustering was done to allow for more efficient application processing, but also delineate earlier access to integration courses to help these allegedly "high likelihood" individuals greater chances to begin language learning and job-market endeavors sooner rather than later (Brücker et al., 2019; Gesley, 2015). The act also had other positive and negative qualities. Positively, it increased federal funding to states for accommodation costs, promoted more even distribution and care for unaccompanied minors and lifted some federal restrictions to make shelter constructions easier. Negatively, from the perspectives of asylum seekers at least, it made some administrative requirements to execute deportations easier, added additional safe countries of origin (Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro) and reduced cash benefits for asylum seekers and shifted priorities to providing them in-kind (Gesley, 2015).

These initiatives have created further practical difficulties in application. The first has been little demonstrated evidence that clustering helps application processing time (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 23). As such, systematized clustering of application processing fell out of practice in 2017, giving way to more ad-hoc decision making in terms of individual BAMF centers being left to decide which cases, if any, would be processed through direct as opposed to standardized means (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 23). The second, more prominent consequence (which continues to remain in force) has been shutting out asylum seekers from easier potential access to language learning and job-market measures that they might likely need, as many who are excluded from this clustering end up staying eventually (Brücker et al., 2019). This has been especially true for individuals from Afghanistan, which has tended to produce acceptance rates right at the 50% cutoff (Brücker et al., 2019). These outcomes have led to much criticism from refugee advocacy organizations seeing the changes as especially undemocratic and unjust, as well as limiting to successful long-term integration prospects (Flüchtlingsrat Mecklenberg-Vorpommern e.V., 2016).

More prominently separated as a group have been asylum seekers from safe countries of origin, defined first by the Asylum Compromise and presumed to be absent of unjust political situations causing persecution. As such, claims from individuals from these countries are almost assuredly likely to be rejected, and individuals from these countries are generally under the most restrictive terms of living (Appendices D and E). At the time of fieldwork, safe countries of origin included the member states of the EU, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Senegal and Serbia. The addition of Serbia (2014), Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro (all 2015) was largely influenced by large numbers of applications from these countries in the wake of the influx years (AIDA, 2015).

Distinct from the direct processing allowed for high- and low-probability cases, a separated Accelerated Procedure has also been allowed in theory since March 2017, according to the AsylG, Section 30a. This procedure ought to apply to asylum seekers arriving from the safe countries of origin or those who have deliberately misled authorities through the presentation of falsified or misrepresented documentation. Under this scheme, asylum seekers are obliged to live in specifically designated reception centers, where they are subject to particularly localized travel restrictions within the immediate town. BAMF is meant to

carry out these decisions within 7 days. If this does not occur, the application is handled under normal processes. As few states (including NRW) provide the designated reception centers and BAMF does not collect statistics on the formalized use of the accelerated procedure, it can be concluded that its role in the asylum process is not hugely significant (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 48). The procedure's existence as a possible management approach, especially despite its non-use, is an example of the complexity of structurally present trajectories theoretically available for application.

5.2.1.2 Procedure outcomes and process management

As such, it is a vast understatement to say that the structure of policy administration and change with regards to managing the asylum process and its outcomes is complicated. The influxes of refugees “ultimately triggered dozens of nationwide, hundreds of regional and thousands of local measures, responses and initiatives by state and non-state actors to ease the burden and safeguard orderly and reliable procedures and reception processes” (Grote, 2018, p. 5). In fact, at the local level alone, evaluations in 2017 estimated over 15,000 local projects had arisen in direct response (Rudloff, Eilert, & Schiffauer, 2017). In municipal contexts, Foreigners' Authority case workers may be “expected to accommodate three to five changes, additions and clarifications to the legal basis of their decision-making per week” (Eule, 2014, p. 44). As such, it is naturally impossible for this work to cover all such individual legal measures and changes related to the outcomes and entitlements of asylum adjudication in depth. But, the remainder of this section discusses the structural qualities of operation created by this general policy climate of change and emphasizes broadly that rights, benefits and program administration have fluctuated with federal legal changes, but also local discretion and responses to execute them. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss in greater detail the execution and provisioning of specific rights and entitlements regarding welfare payments, human capital development, material support, housing and freedom of movement.

To begin with, Figure 12 illustrates the possible outcomes of the asylum process with their associated legal basis and follow-on possibilities, as of the end of the fieldwork period.

Application: "Open" Protection Status (*offener Schutzstatus*)

- | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| Arrival and initial registration | } | <i>Ankunftsnachweis</i> |
| Distribution to states and care facilities | | §63a AsylG |
| BAMF application to begin evaluation | } | <i>Aufenthaltsgestattung</i> |
| BAMF hearing | | §55 AsylG |

BAMF DECISION

Formal Decision (<i>formelle Entscheidung</i>)	Negative Decision (<i>abgelehnter Schutzstatus</i>)	Positive Decision (<i>anerkannter Schutzstatus</i>)																						
<p>1. Inadmissible <i>Unzulässig</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case not taken §29 AsylVfG • Often Dublin Procedure cases • Includes refusal of follow-up applications • Appeal within 7 days 	<table border="0"> <tr> <td> <p>1. Unfounded <i>Unbegründet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not meet any protection conditions • Leave within 30 days • Appeal within 14 days </td> <td> <p>§60 Abs. 5, 7 AufenthG</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>2. Manifestly unfounded <i>Offensichtlich unbegründet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsubstantiated or deceptive elements of application • Leave within 7 days • Appeal within 7 days </td> <td> <p>§60 Abs. 5, 7 AufenthG</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>1. Administrative Court appeal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision usually binding • Higher court advancement rare </td> <td> <p>3. Subsequent asylum application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires new information </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>2. Hardship appeal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process by state commission • Positive outcome rare </td> <td> <p>4. Circumstantial permit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific permits based on family, marriage, training, etc. status </td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td> <p>5. Toleration <i>Duldung</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary suspension of deportation for limited, circumstantial period • Legal (ex., health) or de facto (ex., no travel capability) reasons inhibiting immediate deportation • Local Foreigner's Authority (<i>Ausländerbehörde</i>) manages • Renewal necessary <p>§60a AufenthG</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>1. Unfounded <i>Unbegründet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not meet any protection conditions • Leave within 30 days • Appeal within 14 days 	<p>§60 Abs. 5, 7 AufenthG</p>	<p>2. Manifestly unfounded <i>Offensichtlich unbegründet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsubstantiated or deceptive elements of application • Leave within 7 days • Appeal within 7 days 	<p>§60 Abs. 5, 7 AufenthG</p>	<p>1. Administrative Court appeal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision usually binding • Higher court advancement rare 	<p>3. Subsequent asylum application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires new information 	<p>2. Hardship appeal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process by state commission • Positive outcome rare 	<p>4. Circumstantial permit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific permits based on family, marriage, training, etc. status 		<p>5. Toleration <i>Duldung</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary suspension of deportation for limited, circumstantial period • Legal (ex., health) or de facto (ex., no travel capability) reasons inhibiting immediate deportation • Local Foreigner's Authority (<i>Ausländerbehörde</i>) manages • Renewal necessary <p>§60a AufenthG</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td> <p>1. Refugee recognition <i>Flüchtlingsschutz</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year permit </td> <td> <p>§3 AsylVfG, Geneva Conv.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>2. Right to asylum <i>Asylberechtigung</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year permit </td> <td> <p>Art. 16a GG</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>3. Subsidiary protection <i>Subsidiärschutz</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year permit </td> <td> <p>§4 AsylVfG</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>4. Ban on deportation <i>Abschiebungsverbote</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year permit </td> <td> <p>§60 Abs. 5, 7 AufenthG</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> <p>Renewal necessary Appeals possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply within 2 weeks • Current status not lost </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> <p>Permanent residency <i>Niederlassungserlaubnis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible after 3-5 years, depends on status, other conditions <p>§26 AufenthG</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>1. Refugee recognition <i>Flüchtlingsschutz</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year permit 	<p>§3 AsylVfG, Geneva Conv.</p>	<p>2. Right to asylum <i>Asylberechtigung</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year permit 	<p>Art. 16a GG</p>	<p>3. Subsidiary protection <i>Subsidiärschutz</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year permit 	<p>§4 AsylVfG</p>	<p>4. Ban on deportation <i>Abschiebungsverbote</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year permit 	<p>§60 Abs. 5, 7 AufenthG</p>	<p>Renewal necessary Appeals possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply within 2 weeks • Current status not lost 		<p>Permanent residency <i>Niederlassungserlaubnis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible after 3-5 years, depends on status, other conditions <p>§26 AufenthG</p>	
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Figure 12. Overview of asylum of stages and outcomes with legal underpinnings. Compiled from the legal texts and information from the BAMF website (www.bamf.de), Destatis (2017a) and Kalkmann (2019).

Prior to adjudication, a case can be found to be inadmissible, in that it is declined to be processed due to administrative issue, for example, because of an already-filed application in another country. If an application is adjudicated, BAMF may offer one of three types of positive decisions or two types of negative decisions. Positive statuses may be full refugee protection (based on either Refugee Convention or constitutional standards); subsidiary protection (based on AsylVfG) or a ban on deportation (based on AufenthG) (BAMF, 2016c; Destatis, 2017a). For these positive statuses, a permanent residency permit (*Niederlassungserlaubnis*) can be applied for after 3 to 5 years, provided that conditions of employment, income earning and German knowledge are met. If these conditions are not met, those with a protection status can continue to apply for status renewals.

A rejection status of unfounded means that an asylum seeker's application for protection is not judged to be acceptable based on the standards of evaluation for each of the positive outcomes (BAMF, 2016c); when the application is manifestly unfounded, it means that an application is deliberately deceptive or somehow highly unsubstantiated. In the instance of an unfounded decision, a rejected asylum seeker is technically obliged to leave the country or appeal within 30 days; the time frame is 7 days for a manifestly unfounded outcome. This requires a rejected applicant leave or appeal within 7 days. In the case of rejected decisions, local foreigners' authorities can allow for a temporary suspension of deportation for a limited, circumstantial period of time, a status known as *Duldung* (*geduldete*, to refer to people holding such status), or tolerated, based on AufenthG. Localities decide, manage and enforce the regulation of toleration programs and conditions, but they require renewal commonly at 1-, 3- or 6-month intervals.

Legal status confers the level of inclusion and permissiveness with respect to access to different types of benefits, support structures and participatory channels into society (Kalkmann, 2019). Appendices D and E provide overviews of rights and entitlements per each legal status. As expanded on in the subsequent chapters, benefits and entitlements per legal status are regulated via a variety of laws and schemes. Primarily, AsylbLG regulates benefits for asylum seekers, those with tolerated statuses and those with rejected statuses awaiting case appeals. These individuals are afforded monetary and material benefits to include food, housing, heating, clothing, emergency healthcare and hygiene articles, in addition to a small living stipend of pocket money (*Taschengeld*). The exact composition and distribution manner vary depending on the accommodation type, family status, personal assets and job status. Recognized refugees receive a larger amount of monetary benefit as a matter of course as regulated through normal social welfare schemes (primarily, unemployment provisioning as defined through SGB II), although material benefits frequently remain similar and dependent on shelter status.

Full refugee protection is the most generous status in terms of offering the longest residency time before status renewal, most open access to integration support measures (such as language courses), highest guaranteed welfare payments, access to family reunification and unrestricted labor market access. Individuals with this status are entitled to apply for their spouses and unmarried minor children abroad to migrate to Germany under less restrictive conditions (ex., family member does not need to prove German knowledge, refugee family does not need to prove income or housing requirements), if this application is filed within 3 months of status determination (AufenthG, Section 29.2.1). At the same time, local authorities must declare no objections, and applications must be processed directly at the embassy of the family members' country. Additionally, in a change that came with InteG, individuals with a refugee status are entitled to apply for permanent residency after 3 years with reduced legal thresholds, namely, reduced language knowledge requirements, demonstration of coverage of some living expenses and proof of adequate housing space (AufenthG, Section 26.3). Although procedures to evaluate this have simplified in recent years, only around 1800 individuals were granted permanent residency through these processes in 2018 (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 109).

For those with subsidiary protection or ban on deportation statuses, rights are somewhat more restricted and have been less predictable, particularly with the elimination of family reunification rights for subsidiary protection holders in March 2016 (Kalkmann, 2019). These individuals also do not have privileged conditions to apply for permanent residency and must instead demonstrate the language and income thresholds required for other types of migrants, including proof of coverage of all living expenses and payment into a social pension scheme for at least 60 months (AufenthG, Section 23.4). Full refugee protection statuses have been decreasing since 2016, as have protection statuses in general. Overall, between 2015 and 2018, just under half of asylum seekers received any form of protection (BAMF, 2018a).

Toleration, as it technically comprises a legal obligation to leave the country, is the most restrictive outcome in terms of possibilities for societal participation. At the same time, at least in Cologne, it is not eschewed as a status outcome and thus granted somewhat frequently; in 2018, there were at least 6,000 individuals living in Cologne with a toleration status, many of whom migrated initially through asylum channels (Frangenberg, 2018). The tolerated and the long-term tolerated (those who have been living with such a status for multiple years) represent a group with a specific sociopolitical condition, as their technical legal exclusion, but circumstantial local inclusion, can locate them within a “parallel society” of perpetual uncertainty (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018), a “blind spot of the political discussion” when left unrectified, especially within local contexts that must account for the provisioning and support of such individuals (Field notes, lecture on rights to remain with a representative from Kölnerflüchtlingsrat, August 31, 2017).

As mentioned previously, a primary characteristic of these asylum procedure outcomes and entitlements between 2015 and 2018 has been frequent change instigated at the federal level and responded to at state and local levels. According to Grote (2018, p. 5–6), in an extensive review of asylum policy changes between 2014 and 2017, these changes have included regulatory, emergency-driven, innovative, participatory, restrictive and preventative components and motivations. Based on this review, Table 14 consolidates and summarizes the broad types of changes occurring between 2015 and 2018, primarily at the federal level and notes corresponding actions executed at lower levels. Some of these changes have been permissive in terms of expanding rights and access to services for various groups of asylum seekers and refugees, while others have been more restrictive or had varying levels of success in execution. These interplays have been caught in between discouraging new migration that might further tax existing structures, but also encouraging more positive outcomes for those remaining and likely to do so for the foreseeable future (Brücker et al., 2019; Brücker, Kosyakova, & Vallizadeh, 2020; Grote, 2018).

Aside from these frequent content changes in federal law requiring adaptation in execution and administration, another primary component of the qualities of legal opportunity structure is the direction of asylum procedure and outcome execution downward across various federal levels of organization. Appendices G and H provide overviews of these responsibilities at each level. As Grote (2018) describes, this legal organization of asylum management has been “aimed at the refunctioning and flexibilization of existing structures and processes (e.g., “flexible authority”), [as well as] creating new structures, processes and procuring new equipment” (p. 6). At the same time, this is what Bendel (2016) refers to as the “hybrid identity” of municipalities, as they have been “situated in a tension field between fostering integration and managing migration” by federal policies demanding their execution of tasks within larger, difficult to change structures that have had their own issues with effectiveness and function (p. 59–60).

In the context of procedure outcomes management, the state is generally responsible for assigning individuals further to municipalities once they have been sorted by federal quotas, managing and disbursing budget reimbursements for refugee provisioning to municipalities, setting state-level minimum standards for accommodation when interested in doing so, coordinating state-level initiatives or programs (often targeting education or job-training endeavors) and mandating responsibilities overseen at the municipal level.

	Federal level	State/local level
Borders	<p><i>From late 2015:</i> Reinforcement of border controls</p> <p>Installation of new border and transit checkpoints</p> <p>Increase in federal police forces at borders</p>	<p><i>2016:</i> Augmentation of federal border police with state police</p>
Accommodation	<p><i>From 2014–15:</i> Easing of building and development restrictions with respect to shelter construction, especially in industrial and underdeveloped areas</p> <p><i>From 2015:</i> More transport for asylum seekers to assigned states</p> <p><i>2015–17:</i> Allowance for asylum seekers with proven medical training to assist with care in shelters</p> <p><i>Oct. 2015:</i> Prioritization of in-kind vs. cash benefits at shelters; some reductions in asylum seeker benefits</p>	<p><i>From 2015:</i> Construction of emergency and overflow shelter facilities</p> <p>Construction of long-term shelter facilities</p> <p>Building of shelter for specific groups (ex., unaccompanied minors, single women, single men)</p>
General reception	<p><i>From 2015:</i> Increase in national TSO priorities to train volunteers</p> <p>Increase in published informational material describing rights, benefits and services</p> <p><i>Oct. 2015:</i> Reintroduction of geographical restrictions for asylum seekers</p> <p>Increases in obligatory time in initial reception centers</p>	<p><i>From 2015:</i> Increases in local TSO initiatives to provide services and material support</p> <p><i>March 2016:</i> Facilities established to accommodate individuals from safe countries and process quicker deportations (Bavaria specifically)</p>
Asylum procedure	<p><i>2014, 2016:</i> Expansion of safe countries of origin, presumed streamlining of processing for applications from these countries</p> <p><i>Oct. 2015:</i> Grouping of application processing and some benefits access into countries with high/low positive likelihood outcomes</p> <p>Fewer administrative deportation restrictions</p> <p><i>From 2016:</i> Improved efforts to streamline data entry and identification confirmation</p>	<p><i>From 2016:</i> Cooperation with federal authorities to set up additional registration centers and improve data sharing</p>
Infrastructure	<p><i>2014–17:</i> Large increases in BAMF staff, regional offices and temporary decision centers; transfers of other federal staff to support BAMF initiatives</p> <p><i>From 2016:</i> Increases in interpreter pool and introduction of video interpreting at select centers</p>	<p><i>From 2016:</i> Outsourcing of shelter security to private firms</p> <p>Cooperation with federal authorities to improve electronic document management, processing and availability IT infrastructure</p> <p>Increases in local personnel within support structures (ex., social workers, program consultants, police, TSO staff, language teachers, etc.)</p>
Asylum seeker integration	<p><i>Sept. 2014:</i> Reductions in waiting periods for labor market access</p> <p><i>Oct. 2015:</i> Access to integration courses for asylum seekers with high prospects to remain</p> <p>Applicants from safe countries of origin cannot take up employment</p> <p><i>Feb. 2017:</i> Introduction of specific literacy integration courses</p>	<p><i>From 2015:</i> Increase in TSO-provided support programs and language classes for individuals not with high prospects to remain</p>

Other	<p><i>Mar. 2016–18:</i> Restriction of family reunification for persons entitled to subsidiary protection</p> <p><i>Aug. 2016:</i> Introduction of 1-Euro jobs, trying to offer remedially compensated activities in shelters and municipalities</p> <p>Revocation of employment priority checks in many localities</p> <p>Deportation suspension during training programs</p> <p>Reductions in age limitations to begin training programs</p> <p>Increases in integration courses</p> <p><i>Jan. 2016–YE 2020:</i> Increased possibilities for labor market access for nationals of Western Balkan countries</p>	<p><i>From 2016:</i> Provision of social insurance cards to asylum seekers (Cologne)</p> <p><i>From 2018:</i> Increased possibilities to rectify long-term toleration statuses (Cologne)</p>
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Table 14. Summary of types of legal changes between 2015 and 2018 at federal and state levels. Author consolidation based on Grote (2018).

Cologne, as a municipality, becomes more directly responsible for the actual execution of outcome processes to include accommodation, benefits, healthcare access, school and daycare access, work-permit authorization, deportation processes and toleration-status determination (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). As the two areas of municipal governance, the city council oversees policy definition and delegation to the municipal administrative departments, which execute them. The mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*) oversees the running of both. Each city sub-district has a locally elected assembly which, in the refugee context, can offer funding to local civil society groups as they pertain to refugee-related issues within the neighborhood setting.

In Cologne, the administrative departments (*Dezernate*) included eight different areas as of May 2018⁸⁴ when fieldwork was completed (Appendix I). These were 1) General Administration, Law and Order; 2) Finances; 3) Economics and Real-Estate; 4) Education, Youth and Sports; 5) Social Affairs, Integration and Environment; 6) Urban Development, Plans and Construction; 7) Arts and Culture; 8) Mobility and Transport Infrastructure. Each department has a leader and consolidates the activities of several sub-offices (*Ämter*), comprising several divisions and executing tasks of the administration. Although many of these departments interact with refugee policy in some way or offer specific counseling programs tailored to refugee-specific issues, the departments that asylum seekers and refugees tend to interact with most frequently are the Foreigners' Authority (*Ausländeramt*) (for legal status administration), the Job Center (for benefits administration under SGB II and work programs), the Office for Social and Senior Affairs (*Amt für Soziales und Senioren*) (for benefits administration under AsylbLG), the housing office (*Amt für Wohnungswesen*) (for appeals and issues with shelter housing) and the various offices dealing with youth services (*Amt für Kinder, Jugend und Familie*) (primarily for school-related placements and daycare services). Appendix G includes more detailed overviews of the specific responsibilities of key offices involved in the execution of various components of asylum and refugee policy in the city.

⁸⁴ Some reorganizational changes to these departments and sub-offices occurred between 2018 and 2021. According to discussions with experts from some of the reorganizing departments (ex., Foreigners' Authority, mayoral coordination task force), as well as their presentations at various volunteer events or public lectures, these reorganizations were being planned to streamline some bureaucratic tasking given volumes of work and adjust to operating conditions, being multiple years into managing refugee influxes. At the same time, the broad municipal organization of mayor, departments and sub-offices has remained. Although potentially a productive change, the reorganizations are nonetheless another example of a frequently changing structural climate of policy administration.

Additionally, as described further in subsequent chapters, TSOs also play a key role in the support and administration of many of these services, especially when they are contracted officially through municipal budgets to be official service providers (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). Cologne contracts TSOs to provide services and support in the form of staffing and running accommodation shelters; providing consulting services, counseling and programs across areas of health, conflict management, education, job training, youth services and legal support; and offering language and integration classes. Other TSO support services are financed through municipal grant programs or volunteer initiatives receiving private donations and participation.

Between 2015 and 2018, the structuring and execution of these various and complex processes and the effects related to handling large numbers of people resulted in a variety of outcomes driving ongoing situational uncertainty for the city's (and country's) refugees more generally. Primarily, the influx of individuals crossing borders delayed prompt registration of claims and accurate representation of individuals' data (Grote, 2018). Insufficient staffing led to huge backlogs in processing asylum applications in 2015; only around half of asylum seekers who entered during this year were able to file their applications (Funk, 2016), increasing overall lengths of time for adjudication to stretch months and even years as a matter of course, especially as changes in federal procedure and local ad-hoc allowances have remained consistent (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 21). Political pressure to rectify these backlogs led to further issues, namely: inconsistencies in claim outcomes in terms of positive protection rates varying significantly by location (Riedel & Schneider, 2017); asylum seekers from the same countries receiving more generous status types in one year compared to the next (BAMF, 2015, 2016b, 2017b); increases in deportations even for individuals from countries with persistent conflict like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Destatis, 2020a); and public allegations of unethically or incompetently adjudicated claims (Deutsche Welle, 2018; Kalkmann, 2019, p. 20). These factors in turn drove large increases in the numbers of decisions being adjudicated in courts, in which decision reversals have often been based on allegations of procedural errors or mishandling, and substantially increased time needed to reach final decisions (Kalkmann, 2019, 20, 26).

Going beyond administrative difficulties adjudicating original claims or handling increasing numbers of appeals within courts, the cascading effects of the influx years also caused a similar climate of instability with regards to the structures of follow-on procedures and benefits management (described further in subsequent chapters), as more and more individuals required access to care and support—in the form of accommodation, health care, monetary and material welfare and integration activities—within various stages of the asylum procedure for longer and longer periods of time (Grote, 2018, p. 13). Accommodation, especially during the asylum process, has been challenging. Although the law stipulates that asylum seekers should remain in initial reception facilities for certain time periods (Appendix D), large numbers of individuals quickly overburdened many, especially in early months, leading to constructions of temporary emergency and overflow facilities (in the form of tents, gyms, warehouses, abandoned buildings and other rudimentary structures) and housing within municipal facilities technically not meant for asylum seekers at earlier stages of the process. This not only created administrative difficulties in accounting for individuals at different stages of the asylum process, but municipal resource burdens in having to take on additional housing requirements and large numbers of frequent shelter transfers to reshuffle where individuals ought to be (Kalkmann, 2017). Support shortfalls have also been seen in inadequate numbers of translators for federal hearings and other official appointments (Greulich, 2018), as well as in availability of integration courses, despite more asylum seekers being made legally eligible to attend between 2016 and 2018 (Rietig, 2016), including in Cologne (Associated Press, 2017).

Ultimately, these qualities of asylum procedure management have created vast differences in terms of policy administration (across and within states) (Gesemann & Roth, 2018) and highly circumstantial variation in how the asylum process might be experienced from local and individual perspectives (Bock & Macdonald, 2019). The remaining sections of this chapter focus on this more localized manifestation.

5.2.2 Constructing bureaucracy in local conditions of responsibility, flexibility and constraint

This general structural diffusion of responsibility and emergence of new process creation has had both positive and negative elements in terms of constructing executional quality of opportunity structure at the municipal level. In the study context, as supplemented through legal documents and literature pertaining to Cologne, local governance actors explore how they contend with their responsibilities and resources to manage a challenging, acute migration situation.

A prominent, positive outcome of this broader organization has been that concentrating more authority with local administrations and bureaucrats allows for building more inclusive management approaches or more negotiation of individualized positive outcomes in a local context. As seen in expert interviews, this has been true in Cologne, since, as a municipality, it has attempted to provide more progressive policy approaches and political reforms than necessarily mandated by federal law. “This is more our job,” explains a high-ranking municipal department head. “We have to create the opportunity, and that is part of the inclusion society, so that everyone can find their place and be effective” (Interview with the leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018).

Even before the refugee influx years, built into Cologne’s longer-standing municipal political commitments even since the 1960s has been a generally more inclusive mindset to managing, accepting and supporting refugees (Akkaya, 2000). The city’s integration concept, as early as 2011, states that it sees a primary mission of municipal governance “to target the general conditions for immigrants and to design the host society in such a way that people can ‘come along’ independently, which is a necessity and a requirement to participate equally, regardless of origin” (Stadt Köln, 2011, p. 8). One key municipal structure through which this is accomplished is the municipal Integration Council (*Integrationsrat*), 33 representatives comprised of both city council members, as well as over 20 foreigners elected by the foreign population of Cologne. Its establishment and tasks are regulated by the municipal constitution and the main statute of the city. The main task of the Integration Council is to advise the city council on issues and concerns pertaining to foreigners in the city (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018). The Round Table for Refugee Issues—a diverse municipal political committee of refugee and migration specialists and key municipal governance actors—has also been active in investigating and advancing specific administrative and governance shortfalls with respect to asylum seekers since 2004.

As early as 2008, through municipal working groups targeting the identification of refugee-specific challenges and possible solutions (Stadt Köln, 2010a), Cologne as a municipality has driven a focus on more inclusive refugee policy endeavors such as: clarification of legal status in a reasonable period of time, increased access to individual legal and psychological counseling, more municipal coordination points for information and services, more access to vocational training programs, earlier (federally supported) access to jobs, continued financial support for volunteer initiatives and consideration of special forms of housing for individuals in unique circumstances (Stadt Köln, 2010a, p. 85–150). A similar local success point is the establishment of local integration centers supported through municipal funding; as of the study years, NRW was the only state to include cities offering such centers (Landesregierung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020). These centers serve as coordination points for service and information offerings, geared mainly towards young people to ensure they receive education and job training opportunities.

The Round Table for Refugee Issues has, in and of itself, represented a critical, local political tool to lobby for change in the management of specific entitlements throughout the asylum process. A resource “scarcely present in another city in the form as it exists in Cologne,” the group is a forum in which key actors—“the refugee organizations, the churches, the politics, the administration, the police, the volunteers, the university—can all sit around a table [...] and discuss with each other” how reaching integration as a shared goal can be done with more presumed cohesion (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018). During the study years alone, two key local initiatives advanced largely through the committee’s collaborative efforts have been the municipal commitment to improvement in shelter

conditions, as well as the establishment of a neutral ombudsman office where shelter residents could file complaints about their treatment within shelters (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 18). Prior to the study years, the council had also been instrumental in instigating dialog about finding legal ways to reconcile the statuses of those without documents and other irregular migration statuses (Pröhl, 2011, p. 176). These efforts resulted in the establishment of various specific municipal-TSO partnerships advising these specific groups on tailored options for pursuing more stable legal statuses (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 19; Stadt Köln, 2017a, p. 47).

Within the study years, these specific legalization initiatives of the Round Table, fueled by additional advocacy work of the prominent local TSOs Rom e.V. and Kölner Flüchtlingsrat, also resulted in a municipal program to evaluate the legal situations of tolerated individuals more inclusively, especially those who had held toleration statuses for many years. Confirmed by an official municipal press release, the aim of the completed program, established in mid-2018 and ultimately renewed in 2020, was to “to give people who want to integrate permanently, and who have been living in Cologne with an insecure toleration status for more than eight years, a prospect of legal residency,” (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2020, para. 1). Although the program does not guarantee residency rights to all such individuals, it uses evaluative criteria of language knowledge, work, children’s education and individual situational counseling to determine personalized reconciliation possibilities. Of around 1,100 long-term tolerated individuals in Cologne, the program had already provided secure residency to over 150 of them by its renewal in 2020 (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2020). An endeavor not necessarily common in other areas of Germany like the Round Table itself, it represents “a legal step to say, the city is trying to find a humanitarian solution” within the local context, “an important point in Cologne refugee policy” (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017).

These local commitments to a more favorable local policy environment when it is possible can help support more local authority also exists to manage individual cases more permissively. Referring to the program working with the long-term tolerated, a leader in the Foreigners’ Authority explains, “Our work [at the Foreigners’ Authority] has been made easier with new legal possibilities to examine or rectify previously insoluble cases” (Interview with leader, municipal Foreigners’ Authority, January 12, 2018). The leader of the mayoral refugee coordination task force views this local flexibility similarly positively and beneficially because it allows the city to be responsive to its local conditions and public demands. “Our mayor was of the opinion (and I believe the right opinion),” he explains referring to the creation of the local ombudsman office, “That a city like Cologne, which takes in so many refugees, must also create an independent body for refugees, where they might turn in case of problems. Because they have no trust in the administration, because they do not know any administrators or perhaps the volunteers do not have trust in the administration. To simply uncover grievances better” (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, November 17, 2017). The establishment of this office is positioned as a local channel through which refugees have a more permissive capacity to file formal complaints about certain shelter conditions and elevate them broadly to the city to address both individually and collectively in considerations for future improvements (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017).

At the same time, interviews and literature show that there have also been negative components of the general downward shift of structural responsibility to local authorities with regards to how policy is managed. The first is that inconsistencies in terms of local resource availability have come to pass, contributing to broader instability in the policy environment as local actors must manage to mandated ends, but with less ideal quality in outcome. As Crage (2016) explains, there has been a frank, resource-driven difficulty managing what amounts to “simply numbers,” as they have been “unprecedented” (p. 345). In Cologne, peak times brought 500 new asylum seekers per week requiring housing, provisioning and management, “an insane challenge” (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018). Although key leaders find the municipality’s willingness to accept the volumetric challenge admirable, resources have still been taxed in doing so:

[The acceptance] I find good. Of course, I do not think it was good that, for example, the state government took far too long to really support us here. Because our municipality has been burdened with sums over €100 million per year, although it has not yet accounted for it with tax revenue. (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018).

Here, the department leader refers to how the management of all such local asylum processes—accommodation, material benefits, financial stipends, labor-market programs and social service provision—stems from a variety of financial sources, funds and authorities (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 6). Cologne as a municipality has experienced generally high levels of public debt since the 1980s, although restructuring and reforms beginning in 2016 are aiming to improve budgeting management by 2023 (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 6). With regards to their effects on refugee management, expenses have not necessarily been in line with budgets. The federal government reimburses some municipal expenses specifically for housing for recognized refugees, as does the state of NRW on the basis of the Refugee Admission Act, (*Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz*, FlüAG). As the leader confirms, the municipality has noted these reimbursement rates as explicitly too low (Stadt Köln, 2018c, p. 26), with 2017 expenses for refugee incurring a deficit over €81 million (Janecek, 2017b).

Such resource shortfalls have revealed that “everyone was not prepared and not equipped to welcome and accompany so many people” (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018), although downward responsibility diffusion has made the issue present at all levels of provisioning from the state to the municipality to the TSOs acting in conjunction with municipalities, as one city council member explains:

It was all without order. In this case, there was no federal structure, nor was there any structure at the state level. [...] This is compared, say, to the refugee reception of the Russian Germans in the 1990s. That was very well planned, at that time with Helmut Kohl. And many hundreds of thousands of Russian Germans were transferred to Germany. But that was accomplished in stages, also well prepared. [...] This is why there is a need for, as a whole community, a more solid structure for refugee provisioning. It just has to be there, this is the nuts and bolts. Because, just due to how poor people will always come to rich countries, there will always be more in the future. (Interview with city council member, The Left, January 8, 2017)

Given the management strains created through the acute context of numbers and nodes of responsibility, local municipal structures have simply had to make do in shorter-term management capacities. They must address what filters down to them as it filters down and with the limited means they have, meaning they “must solve problems in the here and now and cannot look to what might come in two years” (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018). This creates instability in that more focused, long-term planning is practically difficult and thus more stable structures more elusive, as the city council member alludes to above.

Also advancing general instability, these conditions have led to local departments needing to make emergency-type decisions and prioritizing, administering processes in a highly conditional manner (see also, Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2), often dependent on the specific prioritization preferences or resource constraints of individual offices. Representatives from the office of mayoral special interest projects, as well as the Foreigners’ Authority, have confirmed this necessity, in that where resource-constrained, emergency conditions have led to office-driven prioritizing that have made longer-term planning more difficult:

Me: Do you have enough resources to carry out your tasks (B: No)? No? (Laugh.)

Leader: No. (*Laugh*). We have a very small group here. [...] In the first year we had to play somewhat uncharacteristically with fire. So, we wrote the templates ourselves. That is, [we did] all things where you might say, that's not the job of this group at all. But to push this process, it was necessary. [...] You cannot encroach on any playing field of this city administration, trying to fill in gaps with three people. [...] It is good when we have personnel

reinforcement for this project, sponsored from the state government [...] If you have a small troupe, then you should concentrate on the feasible. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

But with the existing capacity, we can only support certain things, and we have to agree on what has a higher priority, but other things then have to remain behind for a little longer. And we have to do that ourselves, so we're not just negotiating, but in the end openly arguing and saying, if we're faster at [addressing issues of] toleration, that will mean we're going to slow down a bit in another area. We can try to change the organization over the medium term; in this way, we are getting a little better every day. (Interview with leader, municipal Foreigners' Authority, January 12, 2018)

Volunteer and charity endeavors are not and have not been immune from similar resource inadequacy (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018). As these efforts are positioned to drive components of legal execution such as service provisioning or political communication, their own efforts can also be affected by resource irregularity and related situational uncertainty:

The volunteers are very important, but they are organized very differently. These are mostly loose initiatives, and they now have a kind of public mouthpiece by the policy group initiative, but they are also very loosely networked. 60 initiatives [...] do not always come together. (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018).

In turn, this positioning, mindset and resource environment can create procedural and executional inconsistency at the hands of local bureaucrats and policy administrators, in that they must reconcile their own aims within higher-level structures that might be limiting or changing in their own rite. This has been the second more troublesome component of the downward shift, especially within a frequently changing federal landscape. As Bendel (2016) elaborates:

The tasks of the municipalities are a complicated balancing act: between compulsory tasks [required by federal law] and self-responsible action [as advanced through their own administrations], between regulatory policy and integration, between the legal administration and social services of residency law (p. 57–8).

As federal policy structures or directives—which, especially as they become more restrictive or resource-constrained—may advance broader measures of migration control, a progressive municipality such as Cologne must find ways to exist within those frameworks, while still advancing its own desires and aims to be more inclusive through responsibilities of various municipal structures and administrative units (Bendel, 2016; Schammann, 2015). It is thus this web of executional complexity that often generates an atmosphere of that Gluns (2018c) describes more generally in Germany as “policy-making by individual case workers during the implementation” phases (p. 3), elaborated on throughout the rest of the chapter. A leader within the municipal housing office confirms this operational quality, that is, responsibilities to find ways to be more humanitarian rest within municipal flexibility, but with operational possibilities still constrained acutely by broader federal restraints:

There is a demarcation between the humanitarian, which the municipal administrations themselves examine, yes, or the political, that is, the political pursuit within the framework of the right of asylum, which rests with the federal authority. (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

Local administration can only go as far as federal or even international (i.e., EU) administration constrains it, even if desires for improvements exist. “We have endless rules, everything is regulated for us,” confirms a city council member discussing how broader municipal policy objectives are considered, shaped and advanced. “There is, across the EU, always something for everything, then we have certain standards. [...] So that all plays a role” (Interview with city council member, The Greens, January 19, 2018). With regards to the city’s program to expand residency permit possibilities for certain tolerated individuals, the leader of municipal integration programs emphasizes that the city’s administration was bound to “think about how in the context of the law, as many people as possible might get a permanent residence” (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017). Improvement to be any more flexible could not exist outside of it, despite a larger number of individuals with this irregular documentary status living in Cologne. A manager at the Job Center acknowledges similarly, although describes simultaneously feeling frustration that her office receives complaints about opaque paperwork and complex procedural steps, but there is no authority to adjust them locally. Despite understanding their difficulties, she points out, accurately, “There are already a lot [of requirements]—that’s nationwide, I mean—so that doesn’t just apply to Cologne. [...] We cannot change it because, as I said, it is a legal basis and it is nationwide, no” (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017). Even within the volunteer or TSO space, as organizations respond to service needs, municipal gaps and demands within the refugee space, they must also balance these offerings within their own broader endeavors, or even nationally organized initiatives, to “take care of overarching issues—sustainability, ecology, or civic engagement in other areas too” (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018).

Within the context of local government and TSOs working together inside these larger frameworks, the greatest success in the construction and management of local policy can arise most when all levels of structure better align towards more unified, cohesive aims. With respect to more effective refugee administration at the local level, cohesiveness and clarity from national laws and priorities can drive more efficient execution at lower levels:

I think the first [priority] point to determine is whether there is an expectation that people will go back [to where they came from]. Europe has a duty to help, but more should be clarified in this regard. At a minimum, in Germany, there should be far clearer categories for the rights people have to remain, [...] better integration prospects overall with fewer restrictions on what people can and cannot do with regards to beginning to integrate. (Interview with president, municipal refugee advocacy and research organization, October 2, 2017)

In as much as delegation to local levels can offer some productive outcomes of advocacy or positive discretion, it can also create instability as the study context demonstrates. As the effects of multi-level resource constraints and diffused nodes of responsibility collide, prioritization or adoption of tasks can become conditional or discretionary, sometimes difficult to advance within interacting structures maintaining interworking parts of the system.

5.2.3 Operational limitations of local administrative execution and discretion

As such, there are various operational limitations resulting from these organizational constructions and qualities of legal management frameworks. Although local delegation can at least create a venue for possible structural change, in Cologne, management of these systems includes primarily governance actors and TSOs positioned to partner with them directly. As such, an operational limitation is that dialog for change or channels to manipulate discretion are primed to occur at the level of bureaucrats and civil society, as opposed to incorporating a more direct entry point for refugees’ own legal-political engagement.

This is further substantiated as volunteers and charities often act somewhat officially on behalf of the local government through contracted service offerings or government-endorsed social support (see, for example, the processes described in (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018)).⁸⁵ “Honestly, the bottom line is that there is a lot of contributing experience from the grassroots efforts. Political decisions, administrative decisions here in Cologne are already very close to this base,” explains a prominent municipal department leader (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018). As such, TSOs or volunteers, along with bureaucrats, are positioned to see areas for improvement and report them to local decision makers, who then act together with discretion to advance on the information⁸⁶:

Ultimately, I believe in the processes, in policy processes, where it's all about how laws are negotiated. It is in fact, with us, the charities, now to interact at the higher level. That's us, we transport that to our representatives. (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2018)

One particularly salient example of this positioning in Cologne is that of the Arbeitskreis Politik (AK), a lobbying group built from local volunteer representatives (from local welcome groups) that ultimately manages to exert a fair amount of municipal political influence in merely 4 years after its founding. Although the Cologne welcome initiatives started out in a small, less formalized scale in 2014 (Interview with senior volunteer and services coordinator, Diakonie Michaelshoven, November 30, 2017), as refugees began to filter into the city and more neighborhoods began to experience the various effects of large shelters in the area, more volunteers wished to become engaged in explicit advocacy work. The leader of the welcome initiatives during the fieldwork period—who had a key role in growing and coordinating the more piecemeal initial efforts—explains how this revealed to him a need for a subset of individuals to be more directly engaged as political intermediaries within a special interest group. Additionally, this would help channel specific expertise that was growing quickly, as volunteers' increasing footprint on the ground could inform local decision-makers about these conditions (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017). As such, as early as 2015, the advocacy group Arbeitskreis Politik built from these volunteers had already been able to secure meetings with multiple governance officials to share their perspectives, leading to ongoing engagement encounters throughout the study years (Table 15).

Perhaps the most prominent achievement was the award of two seats within the Round Table for Refugee Issues, a political-legal acknowledgment of the group's expertise, voice and power to advance more acute legal changes within municipal governance structures. From the perspective of creating entry points for more bottom-up engagement, the group was also successful in establishing monthly meetings in which volunteers could engage with specific representatives from various municipal offices, such as the Foreigners' Authority or Job Center. Not only are these meetings meant to provide education to volunteers on various procedural or legal topics of interest, but they are a forum in which volunteers themselves bring questions or complaints on behalf of refugees they work with to be answered by representatives.

⁸⁵ These programs are expanded on in Chapters 6 and 7, especially as they pertain to material provisioning, employment support and shelter management.

⁸⁶ This substantiates the empowerment of these intermediaries to affect change on refugees' behalf (Section 5.3.2)

September 2017	AK receives second seat at the Round Table for Refugee Issues
May 2017	AK participates in the project " Shaping Immigration," a project in which the City of Cologne and 11 other municipalities are participating in over a period of 2 years. The aim is to improve all fields of action in integration work, including processes within and between administrative departments, as well as their interactions with volunteers and charity structures
May 2017	AK lobbies the city to provide a representative from the Foreigners' Authority at every Job Center volunteer meeting
January – December 2017	AK participates in a working group convened by the city administration discussing the topic of minimum standards in the accommodation of refugees
August 2016	AK prepares for a third working meeting with elected officials from the city, state and federal governments
May 2016	AK receives a seat at the Round Table for Refugee Issues
April 2016	AK has a working meeting with the Cologne members of the Bundestag on general federal refugee policy and key issues within the new Integration Law
March 2016	AK submits a written statement to the city council meeting, supporting the establishment of the ombudsman program
February 2016	AK organizes a monthly information session for volunteers in cooperation with the Job Center's municipal Integration Point
January 2016	AK prepares for a second working meeting with elected officials from the city, state and federal governments
October 2015	AK submits a letter to mayoral candidates to comment on 18 refugee policy demands and to state their long-term goals in dealing with refugees in Cologne
January 2015	AK prepares for an initial working meeting with elected officials from the city, state and federal governments to discuss welcome initiatives and the role of school for children of refugees and asylum seekers

Table 15. Key events facilitated by the political organization of the welcome initiatives with local municipal governance, 2015 – 2017. Translated and consolidated from the timeline at the website of the Cologne Welcome Initiatives (<https://www.wiku-koeln.de/mitmachen/koelnweit/ak-politik/>).

In the study context, these bureaucrats and office workers acknowledge the usefulness of these collaborative advocacy points frequently during interviews and public lectures. In this way, this quality of structure might not represent a limitation as bureaucrats consider. A Job Center manager, for example, explains such interaction has helped her office, saying, "When we think of a measure to create, we can think about what people need or why certain things work well or do not" (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017). Although this manager underscores the helpfulness of this dialog, it is still being relayed from individuals acting as conduits to channel the refugee experience. In as much as this quality of management assists office workers, it is a limitation in that it does not necessarily clearly invite in the direct representation of refugees. In the case of these volunteer meetings, refugees themselves are decidedly absent, even if they are very close to the volunteers they work with and there is no theoretical prohibition on their attendance. A description from one of these volunteer-bureaucrat meetings, sponsored no less through the efforts of the Arbeitskreis Politik, highlights the how such discretion to negotiate is positioned at the level of bureaucrat and volunteer:

A volunteer raises a question about the legal calculations for living space and square-meter costs per person. What happens for larger families who would be satisfied with smaller apartments, but the size doesn't meet the guidelines laid out by regulations? [The Housing Office leader] explains, in these cases, individual applications or situations can be reviewed and potentially accepted. The problem may come with the makeup of the apartment itself. For example, if there is a high square footage, but a huge kitchen and only one bedroom, something like this likely would not be accepted because there isn't correct living space for seven people, and it is not possible to stuff five beds in one bedroom. The volunteer asking the question says, he thinks this application review depends on the worker for the Job Center; some are more accepting, some are more tolerant. A Job Center employee answers, the employees try to review whether the apartments actually fit the needs of the family; does the layout fit the needs of the family size? Does it make sense? They can look at how the apartment is laid out or cut up and help decide from there.

Two individuals seem to have very specific questions about carpets and damage in apartments of families they work with. They want to know who is responsible for what costs. What must families pay? What will the Job Center pay? How long does a review take? The Job Center employee says she can answer these specific questions after the talk and try to clarify and take a look at the problem.

[...] A volunteer brings up another example. A [refugee] family he works with was living in a hotel, and when the husband in the family started working, the hotel charged him the entire bill. He tried to contact the Job Center and was told he could move to a "bad" or worse refugee shelter to lower the costs, so he wanted to stop working to stay in the hotel. For those working and living in hotels, [the Housing Office leader] says, yes, they would likely pay the whole hotel bill. She says, sometimes people can try to come to their office to move and ask for a transfer to a cheaper shelter. [...] But, from what the manager says, there can theoretically be cases where people must pay a lot for their accommodation costs, and this might hinder their independence. (Field notes, presentation with Job Center and division leader, municipal Housing Office, March 1, 2018)

This exchange highlights an additional limitation of the qualities of administration, that bureaucratic organization or prioritization can provide some flexibility at very localized levels to offer possibilities for situational adjudication. But, this comes at the expense of an additional operational limitation, that is, creating more bureaucracy and resting the conditional decision points with bureaucrats. In other words, bureaucracy in general can allow for the solving of specific problems through allowing diffused discretion, but discretion can also lead to arbitrariness or more bureaucracy, which increases procedural complexity and decreases chances for easy information sharing, process systematizing or, perhaps most importantly, efficient process modification. The operational limitations thus become a lack of clarity (from refugees' perspectives, who are not privy to the negotiations) and lack of consistency (from the perspective of bureaucrats who are considering individual cases to decide on non-systematically).

In describing, for example, how refugees can file applications to switch shelter facilities based on circumstance, the division leader of the municipal Housing Office explains how evaluations are spread across case workers throughout different municipal nodes of support. There is not only the social worker acting as an entry point, but possibly the municipal ombudsperson who can accept a similar petition and funnel it through municipal structures in a different manner (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017), an individual Housing Office case worker who makes an initial evaluation and an individual health department case worker who can offer yet another individual evaluation:

The families sometimes have special needs, which they make clear by submitting to us a medical certificate, for example. It may be that there are disabilities, [...] the family has a certain size, the families are psychologically stressed. The local social workers gather such a petition, report it to the colleagues here. The colleague here considers it, [...] provides a description of the living situation. And then the [submitted] medical certificate goes along with the description of the housing situation to the health department. The colleagues there examine that and confirm, the family needs such-and-such housing situation; a self-contained apartment or accommodation where cooking is possible or an absolute need for two rooms, and not just a room, or whatever. Or they say, the housing situation is fine as it is. That's one of the ways we address [a case]. (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

As many bureaucrats individually determine the bounds of case evaluation, there is less chance for information and clarity to arise as a result, either for refugees at the end of the processes, but also even bureaucrats themselves, who may not always know how or why procedures occur in offices apart from their own. Areas in which there is a “great interaction of different agencies and authorities [are] unfortunately also the hardest to work on,” explains the mayoral refugee coordination task leader, in that there are complex ways that these different departments and authorities have to work together to “bring about an organizational change [amid] their own problems and bandwidth” (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, November 17, 2017). Endeavors to improve or enhance communication between offices, however, are not always apparent, as a leader within the Arbeitskreis Politik confirms through experiences witnessing attempts at bureaucratic reconciliation. “It is a big shortcoming,” it is explained, “to have poorly organized administration and poorly organized authorities, in terms of communication with each other. I know many examples in which the authorities are just unable to communicate with each other. This is partly because they do not want it. Every authority is like a principality, from which nobody wants to deviate, because a loss of expertise or competence is feared” (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017). Such inter-actor difficulties in navigating or streamlining individualized bureaucracy also aligns with previously discussed notions of the need for office-determined prioritizing and resource management.

The comments of a high-ranking leader at the Housing Office underscore these sentiments. He describes, for example, an instance in which representatives of the Arbeitskreis Politik voice concerns about new shelter sites at a city council meeting. But he also brings up that due to other local and state building codes, and the lengthy nature of city planning processes in general (that exist in their own rite beyond their application in refugee shelter construction), better alignment among the various component actors and levels might result in more timely, relevant decision making:

The intervention of these groups, who [were at the city council meeting], must be much earlier. That must be done with political consultation, which then leads to the resolution. There have sometimes been disputes in this regard. It is helpful when those with political position have broad information and can then make the right decision. But, a year later? It may have made the acting [volunteers] feel better to voice their frustration [at the last meeting], but this does not change the immediate implementation. The [building] sites, which were criticized that day, are already under construction. (Interview with leader, municipal Housing Office, November 28, 2017)

With the creation of additional layers of bureaucracy, and without more alignment, it is difficult to have “long-term approaches” that work towards advancing policy clarity and stability, not merely discretion as previously described; as a local church and political representative explains, “We need standards. We need a concept for the whole city, not just for individual victims” (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018). This extends upwards as well, given that localities operate within wider national bounds. The leader of the mayoral refugee coordination task force summarizes this point, discussing how various actors at various levels play critical roles in streamlining policy administration. It is not only federal laws and officials regulating migration, education or work, but also how well the efforts and will of lower-level actors can conform to them in ways that are mutually beneficial for localities and the nation, but also the refugees subject to the policies:

The overall summary is that there will always be other authorities who are needed. [...] Germany is complicated in this regard. [...] I know the refugees and their supporters will say that this all doesn’t work well currently because there is such a high level of effort [needed]. And the procedures are complicated. [...] We would say there is a lot of room for improvement because there has to be something more. From a purely administrative perspective, we tend to see how to get something processed, make something legally secure, the same for everyone, according to our legal principles. That has to stay. But we also believe there must be more focus on people’s needs. So, how can we all

be well positioned to deal with what the individual really needs, but in a manner that is legally secure and efficient? It is clear there is room for improvement here. We would need to be able to change a few things in terms of larger procedures, but also in terms of internal ones here (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, November 17, 2017).

The result of more alignment in this regard—across top-down components of structure that correspond with lateral ones at the municipal level—can be greater possibilities for a balance between possible flexibility of bureaucracy and the systematization of structural cohesiveness.

5.3 Empowerment outcomes in the legal domain

The previous sections have explored legal components of agency and opportunity structure grounded within the study context. Key themes in each area have emerged to shape the possibilities for more empowered refugee choices. Although informational assets, legal support and legal status itself as a human capital and psychological tool are shown to demonstrate great value as elements of agency, none seem exclusive assurance that a way forward is clear or can easily be pursued. Within legal frameworks, opportunity for choice can be conditionally constraining, especially during the asylum process more generally, but also for individuals from countries lacking a “high probability” to result in a protection status. Similar prohibitions are frequently present for those with a tolerated status. These explicit prohibitions remove clear options for choice, highlighting the value of legal status in and of itself as an essential component of empowerment. But legal status also helps drive feelings of motivation to utilize choice when it exists. In the study context, refugees with more stability and capacity to plan often feel more secure in finding ways to apply their efforts in moving forward. At the same time, the full realization of choice is often curtailed by ever-bureaucratic and complex opportunity structures, as changing legal frameworks and opacity in local governance processes lead to informational shortfalls and less control over case trajectories.

As this final section explores through consideration of these different interactions, based on the perspectives of both participating refugees and experts, the fullest realization of choice stemming from legal inclusion is often described as going beyond mere integration of meeting certain success benchmarks, instead embodied by a notion of *Ankommen*, a full arrival, rootedness or subsuming within the entirety of the sociopolitical living context. Intermediaries—such as legal experts, sympathetic government case workers or engaged volunteers—play key roles to reach this state, helping to overcome prohibitions against choice, but also apply it more fruitfully. Specifically, as described by the participants, they often act as catalysts to change difficult legal-structural conditions, individual advocates (or decision-makers) to influence case outcomes or social guides to shepherd refugees more deeply towards fully embedded rootedness in German society (see also, Chapter 7). As such, the study context describes how these intermediaries represent a channel for empowerment through their assistance in advancing refugees’ legal aims, particularly acting as refugees’ communicative or participatory voices within bureaucratic contexts.

5.3.1 Limitations engaging within existing structures

In the general sense, for refugees to be empowered in the legal domain, they must be able to use their assets and capabilities within the opportunity structure to fulfill their desires to become more politically included through favorable legal statuses and an expansion of rights and permissions to move forward in endeavors rooting them within local life. The effective realization of these goals within the legal domain can be difficult for the participating individuals, but also difficult for refugees generally, given that the legal restrictions associated with various stages of the asylum process can be explicitly constraining and information and practical strategies to overcome them simultaneously difficult to utilize. Consultants from a pro-bono legal organization explain these agency-structure interactions, referring to the components described in previous sections:

I think what they are missing is a good, all-encompassing “first-shot.” I just find it shocking that when someone arrives here after such an arduous journey, that this [arduousness] just does not stop. They lack procedural security and procedural justice. They lack information about their rights, about their possibilities. And I think they also lack access to education and work, including low-level education and work. Participation. [...] Living space [...] because it's just precarious how some people have to live. If one is treated like this, or if only these structures of support are made available, then the situation just lacks an independent—a free-decision—option, that is, with one being so dependent just on the state. (Interview with legal consultants, pro-bono legal organization, November 23, 2017)

Navigating these procedural structures within the context of legal status can relate back to legal status being positioned as a specific asset driving motivation and the application of choice. According to a TSO volunteer coordinator working with refugees and support services in the city, motivation to attempt to apply choice in moving forward is an important factor in how refugees choose and desire to contend with bureaucracy and circumventing related difficulties, especially as time goes on, needs become more existential⁸⁷ and the types of issues being faced become more complex:

There were also different expectations at first; that's the tendency first, to arrive happy to be here. [...] At the moment, the situation is completely different. [...] It's easier at first, then somehow at one point, it doesn't really go on anymore. It's just in a snarl now. (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross January 25, 2018)

A Job Center consultant explains that, from consulting with a variety of refugees in her professional capacity, personal drive is often required to put forth high amounts of effort to overcoming certain structural prohibitions. Focusing on the example of work, the consultant explains that individual drive might, in some cases, be enough to convince an employer to put aside concerns about the difficulty of work permits, the potential lack of longevity in stay or the inability to provide formal training certificates. But it is acknowledged that this takes a lot of time and a high level of effort and choice to proceed:

They need to be in the mood, they need to prove themselves and be likable. Because they do not have what they possess in qualifications, that is, in written form, certificates. But they can compensate for that through drive, if they get the chance to prove themselves to an employer and say, "Here, no, I'll do this, I can do it and I learn quickly." [...] But it takes time to do this, so you have to take your time to reach it. (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017)

A municipal ombudsperson, however, explains how this choice can break down via the feedback mechanisms between assets and structure. Without the right information, finances, or even the right psychological predisposition, combined with opacity in procedures, it can seem futile to put forth the high level of effort required to circumvent a structural difficulty or question. As legal bounds change frequently and with lack of clarity, waiting—doing nothing except biding time—can seem like a more resource-conscious way of managing the situation, despite it potentially resulting in more personal stagnation:

Legal clarification as a higher level in Germany takes a long time. Refugees either do not have the financial, or even the mental, capacity to sit out such long procedures, and most definitely not easily the legal. [...] And I think that is always a combination of all factors to create such a predicament; [...] it is simply so, that a domestic German procedure takes so long, as it currently is; well then, perhaps just wait until March, until the deadline possibly expires. That is a lot simpler and costs less money than legal action. So, these are always very practical considerations the refugees have to contend with. (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017)

⁸⁷ Chapter 6 covers this aspect in more detail within the context of the economic domain.

The individual participating refugees themselves confirm these feelings as they reflect on their experiences on how they choose or do not to put forth effort navigating specific legal issues. In some cases, they do not have any choice at all in terms of how they might explicitly combat a particular legal decision. Mrs. T2, for example, a Serbian Roma woman with 12 children, living for over four years in Cologne with a toleration status, discusses her father's difficulties retaining work with a toleration status. When his permit to work is revoked, he feels his efforts to learn German and obtain work in the first place seem futile. Not only is his legal capacity and choice to work revoked, he feels using choice to attempt to move forward would not likely be useful, given past efforts do not resolve favorably:

She explains that her father used to work as a cleaner in a restaurant. He was not able to learn very good German, but he learned enough to get by. She explains that he is "in retirement now" and not working, but that he had some difficulties with his residency papers after about 6 years of constant work. She says [...] that despite having knowledge of some German and a job, the Foreigners' Authority challenged his status and so he stopped working after. He did not have the desire to keep trying anymore, she says. (Field notes, March 2, 2018)

Mr. and Mrs. A2, a younger Afghani couple with two children, discuss a similar sentiment, when I ask if their ban on deportation status makes them feel their goals are attainable. They question whether they have the stamina to keep trying to reach them with regards to education and employment, especially when those in supporting roles express their own doubts to them:

Mrs. A2 says, "I feel doubtful, honestly. Personally, I trust myself. But, when I ask other people about my ideas, they say, well this is too hard. You might not be able to learn well enough to do it. I try to tell myself, a person has to know when they can do themselves. So, I think I can, but I am not sure." (Interview with Family A2, April 9, 2018)

The journal interview with the previously mentioned, long-tolerated Serbian family underscores similar sentiments from their living within the highly discretionary context of ever-renewing toleration. Feeling dependent on other people to decide what he might do and how he might do it, the family's male breadwinner questions whether choosing ways to move forward are relevant at all, given that arbitrary bureaucratic discretion might completely derail them:

Then an even worse situation came for us. My work permit has been revoked! The reason was the toleration. But without a work permit, I had no chance of a safe right to stay. From my point of view, a very clever and ingenious bureaucratic trick to deprive certain undesirable people of the right to stay and human dignity. (Schmitz & Sejdović, 2017, p. 9–11)

The sentiments are not somehow misplaced, given that many elements of the legal bounds are more rigid, controlled by others and not always possible to change without the right status. "There is a certain group of people, even among the refugees, who will probably never come into our working world," explains a Job Center manager. "The overall situation in Germany [is] difficult, but it just is that way" (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017). As such, the legal presence of certain permissions or choices in how to apply them, enhancing the sense of motivation to tackle such difficulties purposefully, is a necessary step towards what various experts during interviews refer to as a notion of *Ankommen*. Although this word literally means "arrival," it is frequently used by various experts within the context of discussing how refugees' broader choices for more robust life possibilities go deeper than simply existing and meeting certain government success metrics of so-called integration.⁸⁸ Recalling the integration-related criticisms of integration in Chapter 3, according to key themes shown across interviews,

⁸⁸ The quotations utilizing the German term are provided in footnotes, to provide additional linguistic context.

Ankommen instead embodies a cohesive rootedness or embeddedness within German society, not merely a satisfaction of points of integration like passing a language exam or simply having any paid work. Rather, it is a holistic “arrival” into German society, that is, the “whole colorful bouquet of integration” as one municipal department leader describes, that means full “envelopment [*ankommen*] within the center of society” (Interview with leader, municipal Housing Office, November 28, 2017⁸⁹).

As far as choice and reaching this state are concerned, permissive legal rights are a key entry point. “If I leave them [refugees] in uncertainty for so long, as in, is one permitted to remain here or not,” explains an Evangelical church leader and political representative, “Then of course that prevents them from taking root [*Ankommen*]” (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018⁹⁰). These permissive legal possibilities in turn fuel motivation, which can enhance desires to use choices, as well as feelings that choices can actually be applied to reach more fulfilling ends:

We would like people to be brought into society in a so-called integrated manner, but that also means that one must actually get professional prospects, that one can speak the language. Of course, the professional prospect and these other types of things naturally take a long time [to develop]. And there, I think, some people do not have a lot of patience. Now it has been said that one can assume a five-year timeline—that is, what it takes from when a person who does not speak German first goes to the course, then receives further clarifications of professional qualifications from home, then possibly an apprenticeship, or not an apprenticeship—to consider how someone like this can really take root [*ankommen*] here in society. And yes, I think there is a lot in it, also, the personal background I bring along. (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017⁹¹)

On the other hand, there is also this psychological moment. They fled for a long time and wanted to establish [*ankommen*] somewhere. And maybe, [there is] the illusion that taking root [*Ankommen*] would be different and easier. In terms of accommodation, in terms of arrival, in terms of language, work, permits. And everything is difficult, and especially the first circumstances in life are particularly difficult. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, November 17, 2017⁹²)

But as various feedback mechanisms continue, possibilities for these feelings and outcomes of embeddedness are tied not only to legal status, but still to other potentially more empowered actors, as possessing a legal status represents a cue for intermediaries to offer personal help or investment. It is a cue for them to see refugees as allowed to be subsumed, as one social worker explains, to be actually welcomed into this deeper sense of rootedness and bypass the hurdles to reaching necessary intervening steps:

The social worker acknowledges that access to these language resources, and also other service offerings, “depend on a person’s status and country” here. “Without residency rights, it is difficult to invest in these people because they are not allowed to be here. This changes,” she continues, “when their status changes. It is easier to invest

⁸⁹ The official refers to this as “den ganzen bunten Strauß der Integration [...] Ankommen in der Mitte der Gesellschaft.”

⁹⁰ Wenn ich sie solange in Unsicherheit lasse, „Darfst du hier bleiben oder nicht?“, dann verhindert das natürlich das Ankommen.

⁹¹ Wir möchten ja, dass Menschen sogenannt integriert werden in der Gesellschaft ankommen, das heißt aber auch, dass ich auch tatsächlich eine berufliche Perspektive bekomme, dass ich meine Sprache sprechen kann, danach die berufliche Perspektive und das sind Dinge, die dauern natürlich. Und da ist die Geduld, glaube ich, bei manchen nicht so groß. Und ich sehe schon und das wurde jetzt auch mal so genannt, dass man fünf Jahre man annehmen kann, die es braucht, bis ein Mensch, der noch nicht Deutsch spricht, erstmal in den Kurs geht, dann die weiteren Abklärungen des beruflichen Backgrounds von zu Hause, eine Ausbildung möglicherweise, oder nicht Ausbildung, um dann zu gucken, wo kann so jemand auch ankommen hier in der Gesellschaft. Und ja, da glaube ich, liegt viel drin, auch in der persönlichen Ausstattung, die ich mitbringe

⁹² Auf der anderen Seite, dann kommt ja auch noch dieses psychische Moment dazu. Sie sind lange geflohen und hatten den Wunsch auch irgendwo anzukommen. Und vielleicht die Illusion, dass dieses Ankommen anders und einfacher wäre. In puncto Unterbringung, in puncto Ankommen, in puncto Sprache, Arbeit, Genehmigungen. Und alles ist schwierig und gerade die ersten Lebensumstände, sind besonders schwierig.

in people then.” In fact, she clarifies, refugees themselves have an obligation to attend German language and integration courses when they have certain statuses here. But in return, she acknowledges that once people have this status, there is a lot of effort and consulting [*Beratung*] to try to get them into training programs. She says there is effort put forth to try to match their skills, the languages they know and their desires with training opportunities. But she emphasizes that all this opens up with the “right to remain” [*Bleibrecht*]. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, July 19, 2017)

With this fuller status, this full recognition, coupled with the more social indicator that help is presumably warranted, individual choice becomes somewhat more straightforward to implement, as a TSO program consultant describes the interactions:

I think first and foremost, the family or the refugee decides for himself what he wants. [...] This can come in phases. The experience is that when a refugee has decided—well, if he has a residence prospect and says, “And then Germany is now my country”—then the success story is preprogrammed, for the most part. (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018)

Mr. P2, a Kurdish Syrian and father of four with a recognized status, holds sentiments that embody this idea, that is, the notion that the state makes a person real and shapes individual visions of what *Ankommen* might mean and how it might be reached. “We were living in Syria, but the government wouldn’t give us any papers or documents,” he says. “We weren’t real” (Field notes, April 29, 2018). He goes on to clarify that Germany is the best place in Europe because Syrians can get papers. Finally, with papers, he is real. Because he is real, because he exists in his new country’s eyes, he has more choice to see Germany as his new land from where he should take culture and in which his efforts to move forward might make logical sense. But without this—the acknowledgment of being real as conferred by status—choices for more fuller arrival become more threatened. Choices may cease to exist vis-a-vis what is forbidden by the state. If choices do exist, refugees, without being “real,” may feel a lack of purpose in ultimately trying to execute them. After all, as C3 says, “It is too bad, living without documents.” P1 agrees, “Yes, without documents, you are nothing” (Interview with C3 and P1, September 18, 2017).

5.3.2 Success through institutional intermediaries

Especially for those with more restrictive legal status, choices are often acutely constrained by written prohibitions on what can and cannot be done. But additionally, even for those with more favorable statuses, the use and realization of choice can be hindered by the structural organization of legal decision making that is adjudicated at the federal level, but as previously discussed, managed situationally at the local level, often driven by resource or discretionary concerns and preferences. Ways of managing specific cases, permissions, permits or exceptions are granted locally by individual bureaucrats, but so too are governance-TSO partnerships that position TSOs to act in an extended management capacity and create another intermediary layer. With general procedural opacity at each level, but room for possible reconciliation of certain legal difficulties placed at this more local level, connections to intermediaries here offer a clearer potential way towards enhancing the efficacy of refugees’ experiences and choices in the study context.

Refugees in the study describe feeling somewhat beholden to these connections when navigating legal structures or various municipal processes. As Mr. A2 explains, “I think we will need help for a while. As long as we really don’t understand the language, the culture, the rules, we will always have a need for somebody to help us” (Interview with Family A2, April 9, 2018). There is a shared perception among many participants that choice cannot be adequately used unless there is somebody else to enhance it. Mrs. M1 describes feeling abandoned by social workers, volunteers and even “the city” (i.e., the bureaucrats in charge of certain local moving decisions), when she is unable to effectively exercise choice in negotiating a room in a better shelter (or moving out completely):

Mrs. M1 does not understand why Mrs. F2's family was able to find an apartment, or why [another] family could move into a private unit within the better shelter building, when she was told she could not. "Everything here is difficult," she says. "I go to [the social workers at the shelter] and ask them, can I move in here [the better shelter building]? Can I have an apartment here? But they say, no. The city also says no. But then, this other family gets to move in? Why does Mrs. F2's family get to find an apartment? I heard a German lady helped them. Why doesn't a German family help me? This was only how they could get an apartment." (Field notes, January 11, 2018)

With regards to the management of shelter placement, even though she possesses a subsidiary protection status (more favorable than a toleration, albeit somewhat less permissive than a fully recognized status), Mrs. M1 feels that her choice to move is only usable if a sympathetic social worker or case worker could facilitate. Indeed, the deep degree of personalized support that can be possible at the volunteer level has led to the use of the term "godparent" (*Paten*) to describe the role and nature of particularly involved volunteers who serve as these functional and social conduits to finding inroads and solutions to more advancing needs. When asked what support refugees find the most helpful, a municipal TSO leader describes that it is without a doubt the volunteer godparents who serve as careful and attentive guides to refugees:

It is the personal support provided by companions, by the godparents and members of the local welcome initiatives. This specific type of support is held in high regard because it means one is always in touch with a personal contact, because one can get somewhere more directly through dialoging with each other and making use of this contact. (Interview with leader, municipal refugee support programs, Red Cross, December 5, 2017)

The engaged intermediary—the godparent here—is perceived to be so helpful because it represents an individual (either possibly or actually) more likely to work at a level of intervention at which change might be possible, especially for those attempting to engage with legal issues or bureaucratic processes, as a municipal volunteer coordinator describes:

I think most people find the godparenting partnerships, the "sponsorships" most useful, especially in the shelters. [...] Now, with just many more concerns, as I said, very many wish for godparents. Some have also already noticed and think, 'Oh, if you have a godparent, then everything is much easier here in Germany, because [*smirking*] there is a German by my side.' [...] It helps because the person can speed up processes. [...] We are always looking for them [these types of volunteers] urgently because they are perceived as such to be so effective. (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018)

The value of these intermediaries as a tool to enhance choice is not only high as the refugee participants perceive, but also as government structures themselves recognize, construct and perpetuate. Various local governance actors themselves see intermediary individuals as necessary to the process of forward advancement and the application of refugees' individual choices. Although the motivation stems in part from the nature of provisioning structures which have been taxed in the influx years and have a reliance on TSO support out of necessity (Chapter 6), they nonetheless count on and position them to be more directly responsible for guiding refugees the confines of governance structures, as the team from the Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force outlines:

We are supported also through volunteers, that is, we develop the measures and programs that we have, transparent service offerings, and we say to them, we have a new project going on. [...] When you have people, whom you look after, that are also within the correct legal framework from our perspective; I mean to say, we always have to check what prospects to remain a person has and whether it fits within the construct of the offering. Anyway, then we ask, would anybody from your group of fosterlings like to participate in the project? And then comes one or the other. [...] And we also notice that operating this way, that we work very well together [with the volunteers]. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, November 17, 2017)

They go on to explain how, in turn, the intermediaries begin to internalize this positioning and advance it themselves within their own roles, also underscored by municipal governance actors:

How should one get along? The refugees are looked after by us [welfare structures], they are looked after by volunteers and this process is churning along. People then are limited in their independence. And often they are also patronized. Because even volunteers sometimes tend to know what is better for you than you know yourself. That's how it is. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, November 17, 2017)

A TSO program consultant also describes the role of consultants and social workers as “key, [...] reference people for the residents, [...] always in the background” (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018). Another TSO leader perhaps goes further, inserting TSOs as a nearly obligatory intermediary without which refugees have no capacity for engagement, reporting, “I believe the charities are those who transport the views of the refugees” (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2018). These actors internalize their own roles as a necessary, driving force to propel more relevant application of refugees’ choices. A welcome initiative leader, for example, explains, “I’m one of those who have been saying for years that you have to support refugee self-help groups. That means, give them a space available for meeting, [...] money. [...] Turn to me or to us [our organization], and then you’ll get [resources] from us, like that” (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018). A Red Cross social worker expands on this further, describing how it is the responsibility of appointed social workers and the volunteers they coordinate to act as a conduit between refugees and political structures, offering entry points to engage with them:

But nonetheless, the [assisting individuals] mediate, sometimes accompany [the refugees] or at least accompany them in counseling, and not leave them alone. But yes, our basic need coverage in Germany is quite good. [...] But here is what we can most accomplish: advising on the understanding of our country and our networking or our ministries and the construction of how things are. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018)

As these intermediaries continue to act, they gain further specific expertise to advance particular issues, reinforcing their own perceptions, as well as those of local decision makers or bureaucrats, that they are necessary and valuable, per a TSO leader:

And then it's just like that, after a certain time, they [bureaucrats] know us. So, at the social office responsible for asylum seekers, they know me there, and when I call and say, look, this and that is what went wrong here, then they know that I am a professional person and not just a misinformed volunteer who didn't understand. So, regarding this work, I believe many authorities are very happy with us. (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2018)

A municipal ombudsperson labels this positioning as “get[ing] the different levels together” in a way that allows uniting of refugees’ bottom-up perspectives to higher ones (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017). The ombudsperson further expands on this bridging as:

It is the task of social work to support by offering space, by offering materials and, if necessary, support groups that are formed. Of course, they have their approaches to refugee work, and perhaps an independent complaints office [like this] can do less, but it is also important that other opinions are formed and [...] we can also talk to each other and consider whether there are topics or complaints that we can process and move forward with. (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017)

As such, the specific roles that intermediaries play in the legal domain is two-fold: in one way, to act as individuals who can advance more positive legal outcomes through their expertise and positioning, but also act as a method of political-legal voice and participation, not only sometimes literally speaking for refugees as language interpreters and messengers, but as proxies for refugees to be advocates elevating specific concerns about their legal conditions.

5.3.2.1 Driving legal reconciliations

Recalling the value of information as a key component of agency, legal intermediaries of course play an obvious role in applying specific legal knowledge to advance particular legal ends. As the laws are complex, changing frequently with regards to specifics, “it would be much more difficult,” agrees a municipal ombudsperson, to “contend with a change in status [...] if there were no specific refugee [legal] advice” (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017). An active volunteer from a welcome initiative describes the interplays between financial, legal and acute intermediary needs from his work with a female refugee who had a child with an EU-citizen, a “nightmare” legal status (as he labels it), especially when the individual comes from a low-probability to remain country. The volunteer explains:

She was not recognized, so, the amount of monthly stipend money [she received] was very small, 150 euros or whatever it is. And so, that's very little, so, she must consider, “Do I pay for a lawyer to try to answer that very specific question? But I have very little money for it, so what do I do? Do I try to use this small amount of money to pay a lawyer? The social worker here in the camp has no idea about my question. Then, what am I doing? "How can you solve such problems yourself? That can be very difficult. (Interview with volunteer, local welcome initiative, January 25, 2018)

These decisions are difficult to reconcile, but necessary, especially in that there are always “strategies” or “tricks” that legal personnel can offer to potentially enhance specific outcomes in complex cases (Conversation with translator after interview, April 9, 2018). A legal navigator is thus required in a concrete sense to move forward in overcoming problems in this regard, explains a political and church leader:

It is clear, when a court decides, “No, you cannot stay here,” one must be well connected to do as he would want, so this networking helps to file a protest or maybe even to get sanctuary in a specific case or something like this. In this regard, it is only in very narrow terms that one can achieve something oneself. (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018).

The consultants from a pro-bono legal organization explain a more specific instance of intermediary success through the provision of unique legal services on a particular case, albeit ones that the asylum-seeking individual found with luck, somewhat haphazardly:

Of course, any recognition is a success story. But there was one example, there was a case, in which an asylum seeker had received a rejection, apparently unfounded, and so a week deadline to file against it, no suspensive effect possible: so, meaning, a likely result of immediate deportation back to the home country. But somehow in the process, something had gone wrong, and fortunately, this fact somehow made its way by word of mouth to [our organization]. A handful of extremely engaged members here worked very hard to have it taken care of, work with a hardship request, and help arrange a vocational training position within an immediate period of time; it was very exciting, and it worked. And that person is still here now. So, that was a huge success, seeing how different people from this organization could work together to quickly to achieve a lot for somebody. (Interview with legal consultants, pro-bono legal organization, November 23, 2017)

At the same time, such intermediaries are more than just lawyers who know how to apply information in court cases. Intermediaries can also be the shelter, civil society or bureaucratic actors better positioned to act as conduit points to advance discretionary points of action. As E1, the single-mother refugee from Cameroon explains, social workers often position themselves to refugees as those who “help you figure out all the aspects of your case” (Field notes, July 20, 2017). As other individuals report across conversations, they help read legal documents, attempt to move appointments with city officials, arrange when able for translators and make phone calls to investigate the status of local requests, such as transfers to other shelters as a result of specific individual circumstances or updates on welfare account issues.

Bureaucrats themselves, recalling the power they have in constructing matters of case management with individual discretion, become similar intermediaries positioned to enhance refugees’ capacity for productive outcomes in legal matters. A volunteer leader captures this discretion and inconsistency in his observation that “If someone in power does not feel like doing it, it is always possible to find a law to say it is not going to work” (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018). Participating refugees confirm many similar sentiments in describing their experiences working with bureaucrats, who appear to them to use high levels of preference in discretion in managing the processing of cases and requests. C3, for example, feels frustrated that some employees seem more willing to allow appointments with translators than others, who insist on doing appointments in German or seem to arbitrarily decide to allow some appointments to be conducted in Arabic as opposed to English:

C3 says one time she was at a municipal appointment and could not get a translator that day. While she was waiting, a worker came out of the office and said to the waiting room, “Does anybody speak Arabic?” A person who was German raised their hand and said yes, he could help with a translation need because he had studied Arabic. C3 rhetorically asks, “Why does somebody not ask the same with me and English when I do not have an interpreter?” (Interview with C3 and P1, September 18, 2017).

E1 similarly feels nervous and uncertain in dealing with the myriad of individuals she encounters going to various required appointments at different offices because she does not know what type of temperament or service attitude to expect:

E1 also tells me she does not necessarily interface with the same people all the time, so it is difficult to know what to expect from certain appointments. She says, when she was working with the social welfare office, she often talked to one person, who was “not so friendly” and so she felt angst before appointments. Now, she says, she does not know if one person is responsible for her case and this has its own stress. (Field notes, February 8, 2018)

On the other hand, Mrs. T2—as a toleration-status holder for four years—describes what she perceives as a higher level of efficiency in the processing of her frequent toleration renewal because she works consistently with the same person. Through routinely working with the same office worker with whom she has developed a friendly relationship, she perceives an easier way to cope with her situation. She feels her choices to engage with the office worker, as they have developed rapport, leads to more productive ends because the office worker has also become sympathetic. When I ask her if she would prefer a more secure (non-toleration) legal status, she says she would feel nervous in some ways because this would transfer her claims processing to a different bureaucrat at a different office:

It is so much easier by the social welfare office, do you understand? I have a special account, and the money comes every month. That’s it. Sure, I have to go to re-do the papers, but I know the woman very well by now. She is Polish, and we are always joking with one another. She knows me and my family. The last time I went, she said, what! You’re having another baby? I said, yeah, I bet I’ll have twins, just for you! She said, no, I’ll lose my job! I’ll have to process 12 sets of papers in one day, it will take forever. Do you see what I mean? We have fun with another. And this is much easier when somebody knows you. (Field notes, March 2, 2018)

VM reports a similar experience, although he is a young, single, educated male from Bangladesh attempting to receive a positive case decision. Despite his potential high degree of human capital agency, he feels more able to execute potential choice only after having identified a specific municipal employee who seemed especially sympathetic to his motivational level and efforts and personally shepherded him through various municipal and government processes. VM considers this municipal employee as somebody who can help him solve a variety of problems more effectively because the employee is better positioned to find solutions to overcoming elements of bureaucracy or similar hurdles:

I ask him how he got his training position. He says, "There is a person who is employed at the city hall who often visits the home here and helps refugees with many things. [...] She took me to meet my current boss. She talked to him for me and she helped discuss my situation with him. [...] Whenever I need advice, I go to the lady I told you about before, the one from the city hall who helped me with my training position. I really feel she can help me with anything I need."

[...] VM describes later how he even goes to this same municipal employee to report an instance of bullying/violence in the shelter. This was before more security personnel were installed in the shelter, he explains, and so he sees this particular worker as a conduit to solve a variety of problems. He claims the person who was bullying him and instigating fights had other issues, like citations for drunkenness and other potential criminal issues, but the perception was elevating to a person invested in his case resulted in action. (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

But he contrasts this positive experience of working with somebody consistently sympathizing with his needs in later describing the opposite effects of the arbitrary behavior of other unknown or unfamiliar municipal officials. He perceives his choice as resting with filling out forms and following inconsistent or unclear procedures, simply so there might be a greater chance for a decision-making bureaucrat to decide something favorable:

He goes on say, it is the local Foreigners' Authority that controls who has a high chance to stay and who might have a chance to get a work permit. He explains to me, "There are laws in Germany about how long you have to wait to get a work permit. It should only be 3 months. I looked up the law myself. But I found out that each city can decide if they want to follow this or not. So, some cities say it should be 4 months or 12 months or years. This is why you have many people who are here 7, 8 years with no documents or permit. The city can do that. [...] You need to ask them permission to do anything. [...] Maybe it is also possible for the city officials to find out about what you do [in the shelter], but especially they can punish you if you don't fill out forms correctly. For example, the people there can just keep telling you to come back tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow again. They have the power to lengthen or delay your permits and your permissions. They can give you only a short duration of time. So, it is good to try to follow their procedures correctly." (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

Engaged volunteers can also serve to circumvent these types of legal or bureaucratic hurdles. For Family F2, an educated Afghani husband and wife with two children, the coordination efforts of volunteers were particularly helpful in the legal process allowing Mrs. F2 to reunite with her husband and children after coming to Germany ahead of them. It is the volunteers' organization of money and effort that allows a legal process to move forward, as opposed merely to Mrs. F2's own desire or independent effort. Although Mrs. F2 arrives first in Germany and files her asylum application, her husband and children remained stuck in Greece, lacking money for travel and other legal fees to support their application were they to arrive successfully. Mrs. F2 explains that she wanted her husband and children to travel while the legal situation was more favorable and the borders were still open (i.e, Dublin procedures suspended). She expands on how connections to committed volunteers helped her take advantage of this specific legal situation and better execute the choices she deemed desirable:

Somehow, I was put into contact with two church workers while I was living in the shelter. I explained to them the situation, that my husband and children were in Greece and wanted to cross the borders while they were open, but there wasn't enough money left. So, the church workers were able to arrange a donation of money to be sent directly to Greece, to my husband. They were a huge help to us because of this program. [...] Once they arrived here, we spoke to the authorities and said, we are related, we are a family, so this instigated another round of legal processing for us. (Interview with Family F2, February 9, 2018)

5.3.2.2 Finding political-legal voice

As discussed previously with regards to their organizational positioning within local structures, intermediaries are able to advance these legal or bureaucratic issues because they are situated within the local governance context to often represent a literal voice of refugees, not only in terms of acting as a mechanism to bridge language barriers, but also express preferences within and more participatory entrance points into otherwise closed-off and more bureaucratic structures. A senior TSO service coordinator affirms this dual capacity of intermediaries, describing refugees, vis-a-vis their position within the broader structural conditions, as "almost completely powerless [...] when one is in a foreign land, with a foreign language, facing a foreign culture" (Interview with senior volunteer and services coordinator, Diakonie Michaelshoven, November 30, 2017). The leader of the mayoral refugee task force sees this positioning similarly, that intermediaries are better situated to act as refugees' vocal and structural means of more inclusive political-legal participation, by capitalizing on their own, more robust knowledge of both language and legal systems:

It also starts with the fact that one must be accustomed; a normal person, who grows up here, who knows the institutions, who speaks the language, is familiar with this system. Of course, such people have a completely different situating than someone new here, who must adapt to a very different need. The individual has other questions, does not know many things. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

On the side of language, recalling from prior discussion the important role of information as a component of agency in this domain, a research economist affirms that language knowledge facilitates comprehension and understanding, but also a means of self-advocacy and means to more productively choose ways to engage in legal or bureaucratic situations:

A core problem for integration [...] is simply the subject of language, which is naturally essential in many areas, so that a refugee can communicate with officials at all, understand what an official wants from him, understands what rights he has and what conditions these are. As I said, that is of course a core problem. (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018)

Without this knowledge, or an intermediary to act as a physical voice or bridge between understanding, refugees may feel like there is little choice about how to engage or even how to proceed a sentiment E1 embodies as she describes dealing with local agencies without adequate German knowledge:

She mentions some other items about dealing with the bureaucracy during the conversation. She says there are always appointments, sometimes it feels like every day. "You need so many documents," she says. She also says, "The language! The Foreigners' Authority, it is for us, it is our office. But without German, with no German; they do not attend to you." She mentions a few times she is so excited to learn the language because she is looking forward to the point of speaking and understanding with ease and fluidity. (Interview with E1, July 13, 2017)

P1's experiences in dealing with bureaucrats as a non-German speaker, often without a translator, also make her feel as if her efforts to ask questions about or negotiate her circumstances are not productive. C3 echoes her experiences:

C3 describes how she once went to a municipal office for an appointment and tried to speak German with the worker to make the appointment go easier. But the worker just kept telling her that her German was “not so good” [*nicht sehr gut*] and so it was difficult to talk to one another.

[Later in the interview...] I ask P1 to expand on how she thinks the government cheats her. She says [and repeats various themes throughout the conversation], that the government will always think you don’t know your rights, just because you don’t speak German. So, they will sometimes act as if you don’t know what you are entitled to. She says they might not give you the right money or the right things. (Interview with P1 and C3, September 18, 2017)

Feeling a similar lack of confidence is Mrs. A2, a sharp, late-20s housewife from Afghanistan who accelerates quickly through her integration course. Despite her higher level of German, she still does not feel as if she knows enough to be her own greatest advocate, but she is afraid to use a translator because “sometimes they don’t say the right things, or they will lie” (Field notes, March 22, 2018). Without her own confidence, and with no trusted intermediary to speak on her behalf, she feels limited in how she might choose to move forward within daily bureaucratic requirements she must contend with. Unfortunately, this set of feelings is common among other participating refugees, that they view intermediaries often as necessary to translate on their behalf to obtain greater capacity to influence their specific legal issues, but they have difficulty trusting their efficacy fully. Although he describes his frustrations with translators in the context of being asked to participate in a documentary film project, JY explains how a translator might offer a way to highlight one’s experiences—possibly at the expense of uncertainty knowing if experiences are being conveyed accurately—but without one, participation is not possible at all:

He tells me that he did not want to participate in the [documentary] project because he was afraid the translator would not be good. He was confused to hear the story [that ended up being profiled] at the [film debut] event because it was so short. He says, “How could a person [on the film] come from my city and have so little to say? It was just a few sentences. I bet the translator left information out. I met one of their translators for the project, and she said I could tell any story I wanted. It did not have to be about my journey here. But I wasn’t sure. Translators often don’t say everything.” (Interview with JY, April 26, 2018).

More directly in bureaucratic or legal contexts, intermediaries as translators may be seen as a way to increase empowerment in that they offer some means by which to engage information and understanding, and thus perhaps influence and choice, within a case context. But as explored in the chapter previously, there are often not clear ways to procure the most desired translators, and in the case of asylum interviews specifically, they are usually government-provided and not chosen. This, in turn, impairs choice further, in that even though an intermediary tool exists, not being of a refugee’s own choosing, it is difficult to feel confident that the intermediary will advance a refugee’s aims most genuinely. Both UO and Family A2 describe this experience vividly when recalling their asylum interviews. Mr. A2 feels that he doesn’t think “the translator explain[ed] our story properly. She “didn’t use the right words,” the words the family chose themselves (Interview with Family A2, April 9, 2018). UO, a young, single, educated prior military translator from Pakistan appealing his case denial, feels like his choice to try to introduce documents, speak friendly German and have a dialog were not fulfilled, especially as the translator did not assist in this regard:

The process to prepare for the [asylum] interview was very difficult, and the interview itself was difficult on me. It lasted about 5 hours, 25 minutes, and I did not find the interviewer friendly at all. I worked to gather many documents to bring with me to help my case. [...] But the interviewer did not even want to see any of this. I tried in the beginning to speak some German, to show I had learned and could try, but he refused to speak any with me. The translator who was there spoke a different dialect than I did, so I knew there were probably problems with the translation as it was said. I just had a feeling. Many people will go to the interview and try to make drama. They will cry and whine. But I just wanted to have a conversation and show what I had been through and communicate it clearly. I wanted to talk normally. But the interviewer was not interested in that. (Interview with UO, October 17, 2017)

As the participating refugees sense the need for intermediaries to be a linguistic voice for understanding and advancing desires to move towards more favorable legal statuses, they also sense the need for them to act as representatives or political voices in being able to participate more broadly in legal systems to possibly advance change. Mr. M1, a Syrian refugee with a background working as an oil technician, describes his perceptions of engaging with the city government, as an individual with a 1-year subsidiary protection status who knows functional German. He feels like it is a distant entity into which he has no way to enter himself, despite his eagerness to learn about his case or wish to advocate for himself to improve a condition (in this case, attempting to engage with social workers and city officials to arrange a transfer to a shelter in which he knows another Syrian family):

At various points during the conversation, Mr. M1 refers to the city sarcastically as “Madame City Cologne” [*Frau Stadt Köln*], in the sense that they seem to receive news about their lives, rights, turn of events, etc. from nameless city representatives who communicate via the social workers or who come to the shelter at unexpected times and share new pieces of information. It is consistent even with the discourse of the social workers, who often refer to “the city” as the entity that decides many matters or has the upper hand in adjudicating administrative decisions. (Field notes, September 14, 2017)

From this structural side, especially recalling how they perpetuate the need for them in their own conceptualizations of their roles, various local governance actors understand the theoretical importance of refugees being able to choose more consciously how to engage with municipal structures, as they highlight in interviews. “I believe that it is very important that they have the opportunity to be heard once and for all with their topics,” explains a TSO consultant who also has a position on the city’s Round Table for Refugee Issues. “They [The refugees] deal with their issues, which are so stressful and preoccupying, they must bring these somewhere to express themselves from time to time” (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, December 7, 2017).

But the consultant also explains that refugees must “search and find” these venues, which are often concentrated at specific intermediary program points or “offerings where they can talk” to those who can engage on their behalf. Governance actors themselves also underscore that these points of discussion require such intermediaries. Through hearing volunteer, social work or other intermediary experiences relayed to them, municipal offices “have gained insight into why certain measures work or do not work” (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017). The mayoral task force, for example, explicitly does not see refugees themselves as positioned to provide voice, feedback or change instigation directly. Rather, their participation in political change must be channeled through intermediary initiatives:

Above all, of course, the contact point is all the welcome initiatives in the city, for volunteering. That is, when problems become apparent there, we [governance actors] usually go [to them] and see how we can solve them. Not everything is solvable. Not all wishes are achievable. But that’s where we talk. We set up communication directly, or then speak to the departments internally about how we can improve processes there as well. [...] It is often the case that the initiative comes to us, we become aware of a problem and then find a solution. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

In the study context, refugees have a frequent desire to better their legal circumstances. They want more favorable statuses broadly, but also more insight into municipal processes such as welfare account reconciliations, shelter transfers, work permits and case management exceptions. They keep their documents and attestations close at hand and put forth effort to attend appointments as required, go through bureaucratic motions and engage assistants as they are able.

But as city officials continue to host events at which volunteers and welcome initiatives discuss complaints and possible solutions, intermediaries remain the ones to bring this output back to the refugees they work with to provide explanations and ways forward (Field notes, April 5, 2018). Dialog, clearer participation, or ways of advancing legal change becomes more dependent on these intermediary channels. It is not to say that the individual refugees have no capacity, then, to participate more actively, but rather, that the collected experiences show how their voices and experiences are more likely to be considered when funneled through the intermediary channels that are more clearly supported through bureaucratic practice.

Summary

As discussed in this chapter, empowerment in the legal domain might be enhanced with clearer, more streamlined processes that create a more stable foundation for life to take root across domains. As E1's story at the chapter's beginning suggests, legality and legal processes are complex, intersecting areas of individual knowledge, narrative and possibility. For E1, whose own legal status changes with a highly fluctuating legal climate across various countries, moving on towards more meaningful livelihood or domestic activities remains highly conditional and uncertain. Despite this, she aims to comply with the law, but can only expect incomplete structural support in return. A visit with Mr. and Mrs. SM illustrates this similarly, when their son pulls up a YouTube video on his phone (Field notes, March 16, 2018). Complete with modern Kurdish-style instrumentals and depictions of the singer frustratingly visiting the government offices he decries in the lyrics (Figure 13), the song laments the seeming ineffectiveness of asylum processes, that the singer has been living in legal uncertainty for years due to processes he cannot control. The son says he finds the video humorous because it reminds him of his family's own experiences dealing with legal loops and confusing conditionals. Legal status unlocks possibilities for moving forward, but these possibilities may in turn feed the likelihood to have the assets or paths needed to obtain a more favorable legal status. The singer croons the frustrated mantra refugees sympathize with, "I'll do my apprenticeship, I [just] don't want deportation" (Figure 13), but to avoid being deported, an apprenticeship is needed.

Zehn Jahre, ich bin hier Immer noch keine Papier Leute, was soll ich machen? Das Problem ist nicht bei mir	I've been here for 10 years Always without any papers People, what should I do? The issue doesn't rest with me
Zehn Jahre in Deutschland Immer noch kein Aufenthalt Jeden Tag, jeden Tag Eine Post aus Sozialamt Jeden Tag, oh, jeden Tag Eine Post von Arbeitsamt	10 years in Germany Always without a residency permit Every day, every day A letter from the welfare agency Every day, every day A letter from the employment office
Ich erzähl' den' meine Sorgen Die sagen zu mir: Komm' morgen!	I try to explain my concerns They always tell me, come in the morning!
Zehn Jahre, ich bin hier Immer noch keine Papier Leute, was soll ich machen? Das Problem ist nicht bei mir	I've been here for 10 years Always without any papers People, what should I do? The issue doesn't rest with me
Ich mach' meine Ausbildung Ich will keine Abschiebung	I'll do my apprenticeship I don't want deportation

Figure 13. Translation of the song *10 Jahre Hier* (10 Years Here) by Kurdish artist, Malek Samo (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSTivyUjLZO> as of February 2021).

Highlighted further through interview and documentary evidence discussed within this chapter, empowerment in the legal domain may be encompassed by fuller realization of choice within legal processes. Understanding these processes and expectations, financial assets to be guided through them and favorable statuses that result are key components of agency contributing to legal empowerment in terms of knowing what is possible to expect. Various qualities of opportunity structure enhance and hinder these components of agency. Laws, through their permissions and prohibitions, make certain legal statuses generally more favorable for refugees in terms of job-market entry, house rental, language learning and family reunification, elements of participation within Germany society. At the same time, individual case information may be difficult to obtain, as can be guidance required to obtain it, because case law is complex at federal and local levels. Although these opportunity structure qualities have resulted in some degree of local discretion in being able to improve conditions for refugees where federal guidelines do not prohibit it, they have also created the need for increased bureaucracy to manage what often become arbitrary or inconsistent decision-making processes by individual governance actors executing and managing individual cases and legal outcomes.

As they apply and seek assets to advance choice within this domain, like E1, the participating refugees are generally compliant. They attempt to find ways to budget for lawyers and translators, attend government appointments, try to endure difficulties with German comprehension, seek channels of help to better understand the legal information at hand. In some cases, they become quite habituated at going through and understanding required motions, filing paperwork, keeping documents close hand, finding doctors and lawyers to attest to their exceptional circumstances, visiting counseling centers that might provide more personalized means of problem solving. They choose to pursue these activities because they know they are what they must undertake to have any chance at advancement.

At the same time, as their experiences highlight, the realization of choice is often constrained by feelings of psychological resignation that these actions are effective at all. Indeed, these feelings seem justified, in that merely going through required or extraordinary motions does not result in the most clearly desired result of the most favorable, stable legal status. As intermediaries intervene to help refugees better understand their legal conditions act as points of voice to potentially change case dynamics and structural circumstances for moving forward, empowerment for the execution of more fruitful political choice seems to rest at a level beyond refugees. As a municipal TSO leader describes these agency-structure interactions, the most empowered outcomes are a confluence of various factors: of the laws that permit certain activities and actions, of the information that individuals possess on how to move forward, of the possibilities for support that can be more tailored to bridge gaps that are created. As one TSO leader summarizes aptly:

What I would wish for [...] is a path for people from the moment when they arrive here that doesn't just cut them off, but rather that offers them German, that gives them information—that is, orientation, ideally also [moving] towards school and work. And if that can be managed, one can work productively with people after. (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 9, 2018)

But here again comes the reference to the idea of *Ankommen*, that is, legal empowerment as fulfillment of a more deeply rooted life in Germany. It includes not only the full richness of social-structural inclusion, encompassing linguistic understanding, individual education, meaningful livelihood and productive connections to others, but also a clear legal path that enhances, not impedes, the journey to these ends. The subsequent empirical chapters explore these different forms of rootedness further, expanding more on agent-structure interactions and their influence on choice in economic and sociocultural domains.

6. Journeying Beyond Subsistence in the Economic Domain

Seeking self-determined stability: Family M1, a middle-aged Syrian married couple with four children and subsidiary protection status

From a rudimentary shelter kitchen, a detached room in a former adult daycare center, Mr. M1 enjoys strong coffee, and Mrs. M1 prepares date and sesame cookies for any visitors who drop by. Both are ready accompaniments, along with Mr. M1's occasional cigarette, to German homework we review together during my volunteer time. Kurdish Syrians in their late-30s, they wait around 6 months to receive a 1-year subsidiary protection status, which is later renewed when their application for fully recognized refugee status is denied. They are thrifty and resourceful with the limited household items they have, but keen to find a more stable way out of their more precarious financial circumstances. Mrs. M1 often shows me the household items she finds shopping at discount stores like Aldi or Tedi and is happy to find them at cheaper prices, although not without underscoring to me that her husband still complains of the cost.

Mr. and Mrs. M1, both speakers of Kurdish, are also literate and fluent in Arabic. In Syria, Mr. M1 completes high school and works as a chemical inspector in an oil plant. His wife, who completes grade school, manages their household and four children. Industriousness is a quality they have tried to carry forth from their lives in Syria. Before coming to Germany, they migrate to Istanbul, Turkey. Helping to support the family, her oldest son, then barely a teenager, works at a garment factory along with Mr. M1, who also catches fish on the side to eat and sell. While living in Turkey, it disturbs Mrs. M1 that her eldest must work, as does the fact that her younger children have no ready access to school either. Better opportunities for legal regularity, education possibilities for their children and a chance to be productive again are primary reasons they migrate to Germany when the borders open.

The family's desire to feel more productive is a frequent topic of conversation. Even as we talk about ourselves in one of our first tutoring sessions, Mrs. M1 explains to me, "I say to my children, go to school. Learn a lot. Then, work and study together. This is so important" (Field notes, July 31, 2017). She continuously keeps me updated on educational progress for all of them in the family, which both she and her husband see as tools they can attempt to apply to their own advancement. Her eldest two, as teenagers, attend a remedial high school and hope their ages, completion timelines and adjustment to learning German as somewhat older children will allow them to filter into vocational training programs. Her youngest two, in German grade school, are more easily positioned to be subsumed into a standard educational progression. When they find an Islamic cultural club offering free Arabic lessons, all their children begin to attend to help maintain their multilingualism and literacy skills, which Mr. and Mrs. M1 hope might help enhance their employability later, but also not forget an important piece of their heritage.

The updates on their own educational process sometimes seem less optimistic. Mrs. M1, who has less familiarity with school, struggles with a slower pace of learning in her integration class. She feels discouraged that she will be able to learn German adequately, as she often forgets more basic concepts and feels self-conscious about the errors, which then makes her nervous to speak around others. She berates herself when she has trouble understanding the details at appointments, but often eschews bringing a translator to appear more engaged to the Germans she interacts with. Mr. M1 enjoys learning and studying and has progressed through his integration language course efficiently, with quick abilities to hold fairly detailed German discussions. Unfortunately, he fails his first exam⁹³ and is unable to get into an additional remediation course for a few months. With no job and no language certificate with which to apply for one, he mopes about the shelter space in the interim, often sleeping long hours or taking walks outside alone.

⁹³ This refers to passing at the level B1 per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This skill level is the threshold required for the vast majority of employment schemes targeting migrants in Germany.

Their frustrations, however, do not stop them from trying to think through permutations about how they might choose or build a more stable socioeconomic future. Uncertainty and a questioning of possibilities, however, often dominate these discussions. One day, over coffee, Mr. M1 reflects on this trajectory, which is unclear because he knows neither if he might pass his second course (and what would happen in this case in terms of paying for additional tutoring), nor what opportunities might be reasonably available to him for work if he does, given his background, age and general conditions in the labor market:

If he passes, he needs to decide what he will do after. As one option, he can try to go to more language school. He says theoretically, he might not need to pay for a B2 class; the city might pay. But he is unsure if he can work. He says, "A lot of people said to me that you cannot do a training program [*Ausbildung*] if you are over 38."

I say, "Maybe you just need to go to the Job Center and ask. Sometimes there is always an exception."

Mrs. M1 says, "Sometimes the Job Center says yes, no. All different."

Mr. M1 answers, "I am not sure. I just hear so many people say that." So, he says again that he does not know exactly what type of job he would be able to do at this point.

Later, in the day, he tells me that he is going to classes for his driver's license. He has to pay €400 for classes. He gets 14 hours' worth of lessons. He says it is expensive, but feels he needs to learn. He finds it difficult in their circumstances to pay so much money, but [...] Mrs. M1 has said in the past, her husband maybe hopes getting a driver's license would allow him to have a job driving trucks.. Then Mr. M1 asks if I know anything about work in elder care facilities. I tell him that I only hear about in the news how Germany needs more people to do this. He asks me if I know if it pays well. (Field notes, March 7, 2018)

For Mrs. M1, who wonders if she will ever be able to complete her integration language course, much less pass the exam, her feelings of frustration surround more reconciling the desire and willingness to work even in a low-skilled occupation to help her family, with the knowledge that even such an opportunity might never be possible without formally acknowledged language knowledge:

The day prior, Mrs. M1 tells me in this regard over tea, "I could work, for example, cleaning a hotel room. Maybe I don't speak very good German. But I could learn, do this, do that, clean this, clean that. But I can't." (Interview with Family M1, September 24, 2017)

As time goes on and the desire to progress is met mainly with stagnation in the status quo, they waver between feelings of normalcy and upheaval, sadness and hope, control and resignation. Their sentiments embody how various institutional complexities can quickly derail the application of agency and limit possibilities for choice and empowerment. Defying a common stereotype that refugees are low-skilled, Mr. M1 recalls his professional success as an oil factory technician and middle-class lifestyle in Syria. It is, ultimately, what he wishes to replicate in Germany, a life in which he sets a good example of work ethic for his children (Interview with Family M1, September 24, 2017). He admits to the humbleness of his current circumstances, that he wishes to start again from nothing. His wife, too, is a willing participant, ready to do menial work towards the same end. They possess agency in the form of psychological desire and human capital skills to participate in the goal of moving towards more financial autonomy, but also a more generally stable and complete life in Germany spanning domains, as Mr. M1 explains to me during an interview:

I think I would feel better about Germany when my German gets better. I would feel better if we had an apartment. You know, when we were married, we started out with so many dreams and ideas of what we could do and what would be possible. I worked for 10 years in Syria, and we were able to buy an apartment. But it was all destroyed in the war, and we had nothing. We came here on a plastic raft with about \$100. We don't want to be attached to the Job Center forever. We just want to be independent. We want to work. Kids learn from their parents that they should work hard and not sit at home, so we don't want to sit at home. (Interview with Family M1, September 24, 2017)

Their socioeconomic drive intertwines with other domains, for example, maintaining their family sociocultural values of preserving their children's cultural knowledge and helping to model work ethic for them. More financial assets would increase possibilities for an apartment down payment, along with easier purchasing of items to make home life more comfortable and less strain to invest in other development opportunities for themselves (like the driving course, or even a car, eventually). Language as a human capital asset is not just a tool towards obtaining employment, but a component along with it to enhance the likelihood of a more favorable future legal status. All together, these might also provide inroads to connections with Germans, possibilities for feelings of social belonging and, perhaps most fundamentally, psychological confidence that comes with functioning independently and successfully in a new place.

But then their words come, "I can't," as qualities of asylum structures do not necessarily enhance their agency in empowering them to apply it, but rather limit it with a lack of entry points for choice. The system of formal employment training programs and language standards prevent Mrs. M1 from working even as a hotel maid because she lacks a vocational training certificate for such a profession, along with language skills as an independent user of German. But without a job in which to learn additional vocational skills or improve her German in context, she may never reach the requirements to get such a job in the first place. It is an example of living out components of legal, economic and social life within a system of cyclical and systematic institutional complexities that limit empowerment because they paradoxically offer her family agency in the form of ongoing material support to avoid destitute poverty, but make applying agency in the form of human capital skills or psychological desires to reach more existential material or livelihood goals difficult in practicality.

What tomorrow brings is often laden with contradiction; they are grateful for shelter and for the safety being out of Syria, but they crave the health, psychological strength and logistical stability of a better livelihood status that simply might make the cadence of everyday life easier to contend with in all areas. They see theoretical possibilities for improving their life in Germany to these ends, but also the practical difficulties in doing so. In one visit, Mrs. M1 says she has cried a lot in the past days. She talks about how everything is always broken, she is sick, and life is very hard. Her husband says, at one point, a nod to his own attempts at maintaining psychological resiliency to contribute to the way forward, "Yes, but it is Germany. We came here, and we chose it. So, we really try to make it" (Field notes, September 14, 2017).

Introduction

Empowerment in the economic domain is moving on to find new "[means] to maintain and sustain life" (UNHCR, 2006, p. 3), that is, to build a stable livelihood and act as consumers and producers in the broadest sense. The extent to which refugees are empowered to this end helps them reach their material and livelihood goals and become more autonomous in driving them. For this reason, the conceptual approach of Chapter 2 underscores the importance of economic life as a domain of empowerment. This chapter discusses how the interactions of agency in the form of assets, capabilities and aspirations interact with governmental institutional frameworks to constrain or enable empowerment towards these ends.

As their experiences highlight, the refugees in the study context benefit from the material refuge the state provides. But ongoing—and often unwanted—welfare dependency and uncertain economic possibilities to build more secure, holistic livelihoods still afflict daily life as time goes on, often because there is constrained opportunity to independently alleviate them. In other words, although the governmental system accounts for basic levels of material provisioning, it is complicated to move beyond or exploit for extreme material benefit. Individuals reflect on how choices are not limited in terms of being forced into destitution, but rather, they are limited in terms of selecting and executing pathways to move beyond more basic subsistence. Although the flight from a home country culminates in arrival to Germany, for those in the study context, daily life in the economic domain is defined by a new kind of flight: a flight from rudimentary conditions to more secure, established living, after starting over from nothing. For these

refugees, expectations about economic possibilities may not fall short merely because they expect unconditional or unlimited social welfare. Rather, they expect the ability to move beyond them at some point. As a municipal ombudsperson puts it, “The expectation of someone coming from the outside would be that they wouldn’t have to live in a gymnasium shelter for a year” (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017).

Ultimately, this is the ongoing cycle in the attempt to craft new material existence, the focus of this chapter as underscored by the experiences of refugees and local governance actors. The first section discusses the agency of participating refugees, as well as those in Cologne more generally, in terms of resources they have and what they consider valuable in pursuing their livelihood related goals. As emergency conditions have largely passed, rote destitution is a decreased concern. A common theme emerges that individuals are considering their resource needs and related indicators of agency to be more complex and immaterial. The grounded components of agency that are sought and applied comprise not only financial resources to become more secure, but also psychological resiliency and language skills that are necessary to move towards more stable conditions of independent provisioning.

Based on consolidations of legal documents and primarily expert interviews, the second section discusses the nature of the governmental opportunity structure in which these goals are pursued and agency applied. Although fundamentally humanitarian in nature, accounting for basic needs of survival, the system’s complexity has challenged its effectiveness in helping refugees in the study context reach the material and economic ends they seek, especially given uncertainty in the context of initial emergency provisioning. In this way, the institutional systems are open in that they are often permissive or generous in what they allow by definition, but effective functioning in application is impaired by resource constraints, situational instability and overall administrative complexity.

The final section discusses how the interaction of these components affects refugees’ empowerment to fulfill their evolving needs through their own individual ingenuity. As in the legal domain (Chapter 5), where more capacity for intervention comes from other channels, civil society or local governmental actors are shown to be more empowered to act on behalf of refugees to navigate institutional challenges and drive the execution of choice towards desired outcomes. In the study context, they are frequently positioned to serve as a conduit for channeling refugees’ skills, assets and capabilities in economic-related endeavors such as finding training programs, obtaining relevant jobs and collecting larger or more expensive material items. They also act as key channels for language learning, a primary human capital asset that refugees consider critical in the pursuit of increased material well-being. These themes are underscored individually by refugee participants, but also by experts and actors within the local management spaces, reflecting on their experiences working with refugees and administering programs directly.

6.1 Agency and the evolution of assets, capabilities and resource needs

Agency in the economic domain is driven by the various assets and capabilities refugees have at their disposal and see as valuable to pursue. In the study context, regarding factors of participants’ agency, key themes emerge to include the importance of not only human capital or financial assets, but also emotional assets, that all assist in the processes of starting over from having nothing. In this way, for many, the holistic journey of moving on has become the focus of material life, as opposed to mere survival. This focus involves not only accumulating items that go beyond basic subsistence, but also seeking ways to put human resources (such as professional and language skills) towards other existential resource pursuits (such as finding stable employment and increasing psychological confidence to do so). Additionally, as profession or livelihood is tied to feelings of psychological identity for many individuals, these psychological components of agency can contribute to how futures are envisioned and potential choices considered. Together, these components underlie what is found to be key agency-related factors to reaching a broader choice of becoming more secure in new surroundings in the study context.

6.1.1 Changing conditions for agency in the journey from subsistence to existence

In the study context, a primary shaping force of key factors of agency emerges as the constantly changing conditions in the paradigms of daily living, which influence the resources that the participating refugees often feel they need to meet the material and economic ends they seek. Comparing their past situations upon arrival within a state of provisioning emergency as opposed to those in the present during the fieldwork time, individuals consider the desired composition of resources and related needs as shifting. This is demonstrated as they relay more visceral, rote material struggles when talking about their initial arrival in Germany. Earlier, finances were completely depleted from flight. Food was sporadic on the journey and utilitarian upon arrival in the emergency shelter spaces. Physical health and psychological stamina were in states of raw trauma. C3, P1 and Mrs. M1, despite their differing origin countries, ethnic backgrounds and legal statuses, all describe these initial struggles similarly, for example:

In my old camp in Cologne Porz, all we had was tea and bread and then maybe later some potato soup. But just bread in between. At least here [in this facility], we can do a small bit of cooking. But there, I was always so hungry with the cafeteria hours, and I was pregnant. I needed food! (Interview with C3 and P1, September 18, 2017)

My [14-year-old daughter] said, 'Mama, I won't ever forget all that has happened to us. I can't forget all the time in the *Turnhalle*.' All the beds together, no space alone, no quiet. I won't forget either. Being hungry. The people in the office asking, why didn't you eat? I couldn't eat. We had appointments, but the food ended at 4. (Field notes, April 29, 2018)

At the same time, given the municipal closure of the most rudimentary forms of shelter, these extreme conditions are less common for the majority of the city's refugees as of 2018; it was certainly the case for all those living in the field site accommodations, all of which had a minimum of shared, but closed off, rooms. As crisis abates and time moves on, so too evolve the components of agency that are valued and sought. A social worker with experience working in various types of shelters over time confirms:

There are of course problems here [at this shelter], but they are entirely different than those in the *Turnhalle*. There, there were always conflicts. Whether they came from snoring, crying babies, people speaking too loudly on phones; but here, there is privacy, so you simply don't have those sorts of issues in the same way. Another difference, I think, is that in the *Turnhalle*, people really did not know what would happen to them, what would come next. But they are a little more stable here. A lot of them have papers or a status already. The problems here are less about these interpersonal conflicts, but more about things like getting into German courses, finding work, finding places in a training course [*Ausbildung*]. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018)

The need for provisioning resources appears to shift in the evolution from emergency to status quo in individual refugee conversations about what is needed, sought and valued. Aspirations to fulfill more existential asset voids become the center of economic pursuits. They evolve into more than obtaining rote shelter or nourishment to survive. They shift to finding ways to live more fully within new paradigms: from seeking the bare amount to scrape by to wanting to plan, save for and move along towards the future. No longer are there as many concerns about the preservation of the most fundamental assets of survival subsistence. Rather, the necessities have transformed to be more existential, ordered towards building a stable provisioning existence, as opposed to merely surviving. A municipal leader confirms similarly, describing how the administrators of services are trying to respond to these shifts:

I think they get food in the hierarchy, but they may be missing ways to prepare food. They get a roof over their heads, but they may be lacking private, individual space. I do not know if they are yet accustomed to [life in] a different culture. But I would say what is missing above all else, importantly, is efficiency within the experience of waiting. (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018)

For those in the study context, new material life in a new land demands human capital, social and psychological assets as components of agency that promote provisioning to accustom oneself to new ways of living within a new country. As the following sub-sections describe, these desired components of agency that emerge from participants' experiences are financial and material in that they endeavor to move beyond charity and welfare to take care of themselves. But they also involve non-material components; utilizing and expanding human capital capabilities to new professional pursuits, striving to find social connections and building psychological resilience to have hope for a forward-moving, self-determined future.

6.1.1.1 Financial independence and psychological resiliency

Commonalities in the experiences of participants and the trends described by experts suggest that agency is particularly salient in the form of financial independence and stability. The general lack of financial independence and material assets beyond subsistence can lead to deficiencies in psychological assets: hopelessness, shame or demotivation. "The dependence on government services is a problem for many refugees," explains the leader of a local volunteer initiative. "There may be some who do not care, but most, as far as I see it, consider this a terrible feeling and would like to be independent instead" (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018). Agency in the form of meaningful employment can help contribute to psychological and material assets: feelings of pride at taking care of oneself, replenishing what was lost and moving towards material stability.

These connections between meaningful material pursuits, financial stability and psychological health stem again from frequently discussed desires to begin again from nothing. The refugees in the study context give up the majority of their money or possessions in flight or leave them behind. By and large, they are starting from nothing when they arrive in Germany, despite their previous socioeconomic conditions. Family M1 arrives in Germany with little more than €100. Family F2 has no money left at all by the time they reach Greece from Afghanistan. Many of the participating individuals are at least somewhat well-off in their home countries, but this matters little upon arrival. A3, a widowed, fully recognized refugee formerly in private legal practice in Syria, for example, describes what it means to her to have given up everything and face the overwhelming prospect of beginning with nothing:

I have a problem here. I have to restart everything from nothing. Do you understand? I had a big life in Syria. But here, I really have nothing. I haven't anything. I have to make a completely new future here. I took everything I had in Syria to get out; my car, my money, my business. I came here to save my life. And that is it. (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018)

But this sentiment is also echoed by Mr. W1, a married man from Albania, confined to a wheelchair in his 40s due to a tumor and contending with a toleration status largely tied to this health condition. He reflects on his own more humble socioeconomic experiences as a musician in Albania, along with those diverse backgrounds of other different types of refugees he has encountered along the way. He speaks generally of similar material struggles, despite varying backgrounds:

Mr. W1 says he finds most ("over 90%") of the refugees he meets to be upstanding people. He says, "They are what Germany needs." He finds it really inspiring that people have had the strength to leave their homelands and lives behind, to include their pets, their things, everything about their former existence. He says he admires their strength and that they have been able to escape war and take the risk to start over. (Interview with W1, August 5, 2017)

Welfare benefits fill these immediate needs initially from what has been depleted in flight. They prevent homelessness, starvation and destitution as refugees begin life in the city again with nothing. In the early days when concerns are taken up by the need for rote food and shelter, the structures of welfare systems provide agency in the form of survival materials, which refugees in the study frequently discuss

being deeply grateful for. Families in the study context describe ongoing conditions of destitution, persecution and violence when attempting to find safety in other countries such as Turkey, Algeria or Morocco before coming to Germany. Mrs. M1, a Syrian Kurdish housewife, is grateful and thankful that the welfare provisioning systems have been available to her, especially in the early days of her family's migration to Germany. Whereas she feels her time in other countries left her with little in the way of material goods to survive, she recognizes Germany is different and has at least provided her family with a basic material start. She says, "Turkey was nothing like it is here" (Field notes, February 19, 2018). She describes conditions such as their apartment lacking electricity and being infested with mice and cockroaches. Her oldest son cannot go to school and is forced to work illegally in a garment factory so they would have enough money to buy food. Reflecting on the basic goods Germany provides her, she says:

The Arab [countries] do not help. For example, no Saudi, no Qatar, no Jordan. Lebanon helps a little. Turkey helps a little. It has a lot for its own people, but not everything for us. But, [...] Germany helps us. Germany is good. (Field notes, May 5, 2018)

But as time passes, the need to move beyond the basics of being grateful for survival care becomes more pressing. There are feelings of stagnation, that life must be advanced. An acute awareness grows of this new reality of dependence, as a local volunteer leader explains describing support work:

Many refugees find it terrible to be dependent on the Job Center because they have to go there so often, they receive so many forms, they do not understand at all, and so on and so forth. So, this dependence on government services is problematic for many people. (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018)

As past success becomes more distant, the discomfort of dependency often increases, as individuals discuss. For example, A3, living in Germany just over two years, describes feeling worse as time goes on, not having the ability to pay for what she needs: "I do not like to go to Job Center for money. It doesn't make me feel good to take €400. But, then when you need something here, it is so expensive. [...] What do I do?" (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018). She, like all the others I speak to, including those with lower-skilled or economically humble backgrounds such as factory workers or street vendors, had been self-sufficient before.

But despite their past experiences with self-sufficiency, all the refugees I speak with in the study context remain on some level of welfare assistance, despite their time in Germany and even varying legal status (some fully recognized),⁹⁴ with only few engaging in some work, usually part-time, low-skilled jobs, not in their previous fields. One with a recognized status has part-time work loading and packing boxes for DHL. Some with tolerated status stock shelves at Ikea. One with subsidiary status is training with a commercial carpet-cleaning firm. Only two find work in white-collar industry, although both are asylum seekers with internships or training positions not in their previous fields. During fieldwork, not a single family or individual I interact with becomes completely independent of governmental assistance to support their material living. Despite past histories with self-provisioning, difficulty returning to this is a consistently reported theme.

This is not for lack of rote human capital skills upon which to draw. Those I meet are far from having "little education, no language skills, no knowledge of the culture or other conditions," a generalization that often permeates both media and governmental discourse (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017). On the contrary, they possess a diverse range of human capital assets and experiences upon which they could theoretically draw. All speak at least two languages fluently, and some had already reached B1-level working competency in German.⁹⁵ Education

⁹⁴ Refugees I spoke to had been in Germany between 1.5 and 4 years.

⁹⁵ Some refugees spoke three, four or more languages with varying levels of competency, ranging from school-knowledge to fluency. All (except one family) were literate in at least one language.

levels are varied, with some completing grade school, and others, high school or advanced technical degrees. Most are cosmopolitan in the sense that they had lived in multiple cities or countries. Professional experiences were extremely varied and reflected this diversity in skills and capabilities. Among other professions within the context of all my interactions, I encountered a lawyer, factory technicians, construction technicians and workers, business owners (of a concrete factory, a restaurant and an import-export firm), a leather craftsman, tailors, garment factory workers, a grade-school math teacher, university students, a university academic, journalists and TV news editors, a food-stand cook, a carpenter, a professional musician, maids, a pharmacist and an accountant. Other refugees were homemakers who had supervised large family households and a range of domestic tasks.

Consolidating similarities in their present experiences, despite their diverse backgrounds, points to how inabilities to apply a variety of past human capital experiences can contribute to the decrease in psychological capital, that is, the depression and anxiousness associated with the state of being dependent. To be dependent as a refugee is more than simply receiving government funds for sustenance. Rather, it presents in the study context as facing a psychological state that manifests as an emotional threat to the very essence of self. This depressed psychological state seems sometimes more enhanced for those with more explicit professional backgrounds or identities, as they consider more concrete, decreased likelihoods to reproduce prior livelihood experiences. A3, for example, is a business-owning lawyer in Syria, and describes her former profession as her life, without which she feels like she is and has nothing (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018). Across conversations, Mr. SM, who owns multiple businesses in Syria including restaurants, often expresses sadness at the difficulty of being able to open a restaurant one day in Cologne, despite his prior skills. VM, a Bangladeshi asylum seeker with a university degree in accounting, expresses disappointment when an accounting job offer falls through and he must start a training program in an IT position, one he can do well, but that does not particularly resonate with him personally (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017). Rather than wait or search for another more relevant position, he feels pressure to take up this less desirable one to increase the chances he will receive a positive case adjudication, as well as not snub a connection with an engaged municipal employee who helped connect him to the job.

Even so, these psychological sentiments can be present, despite a high- or low-skilled nature of previous occupation. In working with refugees locally in Cologne to reconcile new means of engaging with German employment programs and systems, the manager of one Job Center department describes how it can be very difficult for the refugees she works with to move towards new financial or professional lives when they are forced to reconcile changes in any former professional or work identity:

If I were to go to [another country] now, then I could not work in my current job and most likely never would again, because I probably would not be able to understand the language, laws and social system of that country in a way that I could work the same way I work here. That means I would have to completely rearrange my perspective. And that also means that my self-image would be gone, from me as a working, successful woman. (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017)

For various participants, gender plays a similar role, as they wonder how they might reconcile their own cultural expectations for work or productivity tied to gender with potentially differing ones in Germany. As legal requirements demand that all individuals with positive asylum application statuses must partake in language courses and potentially job-market entry schemes eventually, both male and female participants consider how these new government-directed expectations affect their own personal cultural and familial ones. Echoing sentiments often discussed by volunteers or social workers, a professional translator working with the municipality explains:

It's different in that many people, women particularly [...] don't understand work here. That is not their expectation or their experience, so they are more reserved about it. There is also a mentality that the men should do it all, should bear all the burdens, but that is also a lot of pressure on the men to do everything themselves. (Conversation with Farsi translator after interview, April 9, 2018)

Mrs. H5, a married woman from Afghanistan who worked previously as a garment factory worker and whose family is in the process of appealing their application rejection, shares this sentiment directly. She explains how cultural expectations of domestic responsibilities for women can limit their time to study German, make connections to others or internalize working outside the home. Men, on the other hand, are more culturally expected to be material providers and remain more separate from the domestic sphere:

In Afghanistan, women don't work. They don't go outside the house a lot. The men always go out and work. But, the women stay home. They care of the kids, clean, cook. Everybody makes bread at home, see, and nobody goes out to eat. So, that needs a lot of work. Here, I do a lot of the same, but I don't have any daughters at home to help me. Just my two sons and my husband. Men don't help in the house in Afghanistan. (Field notes, April 17, 2018)

Mr. SM explains similarly. In Syria, he lives in a multi-generational household with other adult children close by; his wife, currently in her mid-50s, manages the household staff, her own domestic work and the tasks of various daughters-in-law. Mrs. SM struggles in her current language class, as Mr. SM and their son often explain, who also talks to me frequently about how his father feels idle in his own difficulties seeking work and fulfilling his prior role as provider. One afternoon as I join the family and some of their adult children for coffee in their shelter, Mr. SM, his son and a future son-in-law explain how it feels difficult for them to reconcile their cultural preferences for productivity and work within the German context in which expectations for both men and women are different:

I ask Mr. SM about if he wishes something were different about life here. He says, "In Syria, everybody lives together in one house."

His son answers and nods in agreement. "I often tell my [older] brother [who migrated years prior], he should get a big apartment and we can all live together."

Mr. SM says after, "It is not possible. It can't happen here in Germany. Families should [...] not be here and there. All together, all the women and children work together. Cook. Watch out for each other. The men go to work to take care of everybody. But everybody works together like this."

The fiancé of Mr. SM's daughter who is eating with us laughs a little and says, "It's different here because men and women are the same, and everybody must go out to work." (Field notes, April 24, 2018)

A progressive city council member explains how this difficulty in identity and productivity reconciliation can harm potential efforts moving forward by denigrating individual preferences:

It is important not to look at these roles and say, "These roles are nonsense. We do not need them." But rather, it is better to cooperate with these roles because that is more of a step toward integration. I think it is a big danger that there will be conflicts over this. (Interview with city council member, The Left, January 8, 2018)

As expanded on by the experiences of legal consultants, such possible disconnects in professional or livelihood identity—or being unable to find such a new identity—can then, in turn, lead to feelings of isolation in that there is no livelihood- or productivity-related place in new society to situate in. Instead, refugees may be left with feelings of otherness, unable to connect with their previous identities tied to ways they could provide for their families or forge new ones:

Many of them are isolated for different reasons. [...] They are no longer able to orient or identify themselves as they were able to in their previous lives. They often feel as if they are not individuals anymore, as if they are not perceived that way. [...] But, overall, on the social level, acceptance should be seen on an individual level; they should not be considered as an exclusive group that has just come in. (Interview with legal consultants, pro-bono legal organization, November 23, 2017)

In other words, people were something else before; lawyers, business owners, cooks, homemakers. But, now they are unable to retain these parts of themselves. Instead, they have been exchanged for a more generic identity; that of “refugee,” lacking the acknowledgment of their individuality and minimizing their potential for productive socioeconomic contribution. Agency is not merely limited to using or obtaining new material or financial resources, but also improving psychological resources to reestablish elements of a more confident self-providing identity, as a leader of municipal integration programs underscores:

The next step is to start work. Simply the ability to make a self-determined life and to be responsible for oneself. And the problem is that there is a lot of responsibility that is taken away and competence that is undermined. And that just puts people in an unfavorable position. So, in the end, I advocate for a high degree of independence as fast as possible. Because to whom does this apply? We are dealing with refugees, people who, say, have companies in Syria with 100 employees and are probably a hundred times more successful than me here. And we push them back into a situation that incapacitates them. (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017)

Participants themselves repeat the same sentiments, that economic agency goes beyond just money to buy things. Were this alone the focus, it might be more desirable to pursue any source of income at all costs, whether legal or not. But few individuals express interest in “working black” (*Schwartzarbeit*). When discussing this topic, refugees focus far more on the stability and personal legitimacy that legal, meaningful work provides. A group of female refugees from Nigeria explain that they perceive illegal work to be difficult to come by, but that many refugees are seeking this legitimacy and stability instead:

I ask if people find it difficult to get work and they would prefer to work black. N1 says, “It is possible some people do this. Maybe you can find a job like that and the people will pay you. But, maybe they won’t. Not everybody will hire you like this. So, then you are left with no choice but to get papers, anyway. And, many of us just want our papers, then just want to work. We don’t want trouble.” (Interview with AA, AA2 and N1, October 5, 2017)

A shelter social worker confirms the same impression, based on the course of a 20-year career:

No, there is hardly any black work. [...] I can really only say that just one single family [from this shelter] likely has experience with it [illegal work]. But otherwise? Really, nothing of the sort regarding it. There are already a few [in the shelter] who work, and they had to work extremely hard to reach that end. It’s incredible what they’ve done. Even to get a minimum wage job here, so much is required; these families have really had to bust their butts to get their jobs and keep them” (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018).

Economic agency includes the quest for stable finances and work, going beyond just money. It also includes finding legitimate means to feel pride in providing for oneself and resiliency in rebuilding what was lost. Mrs. H5, despite the domestic work she also feels expected to complete, wants to go beyond these expectations alone and begin again in her new home. She understands that in her new living context, work will bring her family more stability to move beyond subsistence and provide items that make their lives comfortable. She seeks growth in this regard because her agency is currently impeded in terms of what she is eligible to do and what she is psychologically capable of handling, given the instability of her residency status. She questions the agency she possesses regarding what will be possible for her family, given a legal-status decision that seems to her like it will never come:

She says, "No, I do not want to stay at home. I do want to work. The jobs are good here." [...]

I say, "I hope for a good future for you and your family. *Inshallah* [God willing], I hope the letter [residency decision] comes soon with good news for you."

She says, "Thank you. I hope we get a letter with good news. Maybe we can have a big apartment, a car, a big garden. *Inshallah*, I know. But, right now, there is no apartment. No car. No big garden." (Field notes, April 17, 2018)

My conversations with Mrs. M1 follow a similar trajectory, with desire for financial independence and psychological stability becoming more acute as months pass, following an advancing needs trajectory that expands as more basic ones have long been accounted for. From earlier conversations, when her family had been in Germany around 15 months, to later ones when the time had reached almost two years, Mrs. M1 expresses that her main concern is working to move beyond the stagnation she currently feels. She and her husband feel restrained by the welfare system; they both desire to find ways to work for themselves, but also want to follow the necessary procedures and rules to secure a more stable residence permit:

Mrs. M1 keeps saying, "Why do we sit? I can work. My husband can work. I do not just want money from the Job Center. We can work." [...] As we talk back and forth, I ask how it makes her feel to wait so long to learn if she can stay in Germany. She says, "Yes, having only 1-year papers is difficult." She continues, "I cannot go to Syria. All is done with. All is gone. What is there? How can I go back? There are no apartments." (Field notes, July 31, 2017)

"I will always be in school. I keep trying to tell the Job Center, I want to work. But, they say no. School first. School, school, school. Then, maybe work, once you can understand better." When she feels frustrated, she tends to repeat these same complaints.

At the same time, she is motivated to learn and eventually work. She often comments on how she does not understand women who sit at home or who do not want to occupy themselves. Today, she muses about how in Syria, it is common that many women don't work like they do here. But, she says, "Germany is different. Here, men and women are the same. Both can work. But why sit at home here?" (Field notes, April 18, 2018)

She continues with thoughts about the future. "Yes, there are always a lot of problems. But, it just comes slowly. I don't want a lot. Look, in Syria, we had an apartment, a car. That's all we want here. We don't want all these new things or even a lot of things. Just like what we had before. I don't even want to be with the Job Center. I want to finish school, then be done. Work or stay home, whichever. I want my husband to finish school, get his driver's license, get a job. Then done."

I ask, "And do you think you can get to this point?"

She shrugs and says, "I don't know. I have no idea. [...] But, it is so slow. Slow, slow. Everything is slow." (Field notes, May 3, 2018)

The uncertainty of her status, the prolonged waiting, the continued answers that she must follow the prescribed course of action with no way to advance on the goals she desires all make her wonder if she possesses the agency to move forward, as well as if the chance to rebuild life will ever come.

Mr. SM also hopes to rebuild some of what he once had, but faces the same issues of stagnation and uncertainty, of having a strong desire to reach a resource-based goal with dubious potential to actually reach it. He would settle for applying his restaurant skills as cook, but faces difficulty even in modifying his goals, based on his skills, to something that might be more logistically reasonable in theory:

"We might try to open a restaurant again one day," he had told me. When I ask his son about this later, his son says, "Yes, my dad would like to be a cook, if nothing else, but maybe open another restaurant here."

I say, "And do you think that is possible?"

His son shrugs and says, "Maybe. But, of course we don't have any money for that right now. Maybe we can all do our German courses. We can finally start working, make some money, then maybe one day, there is enough for the restaurant. I don't know." (Field notes, March 16, 2018)

His son tells me about the type of restaurant they had in Syria and how they might like to one day open a similar one here in Cologne because “Cologne has a lot of chance for work. In other cities, it is not like that.” He explains that he thinks a restaurant might have a chance because the existing Turkish restaurants are not good quality, and his father knows how to make good quality food and do it correctly. The son said, “The Turkish borrowed falafel; they learned how to make it from us. But it came from Syria, so we would make the real kind.” He continues, “Maybe after 20 years here, we could have a restaurant. (Field notes, April 27, 2018)

Despite agency in the form of rote skills, Mr. SM and his son feel agency to execute these desires is still limited with regards to the necessary material and motivational psychological components. As their experiences illustrate, along with those of others, more financial stability and positive psychological mindsets emerge from the study context as key components to pursue a successful journey of moving on towards a more a more fruitful livelihood and provisioning state.

6.1.1.2 Language as a human capital asset

An additional essential element of agency in moving towards greater financial and psychological independence is found to be mastery of the German language. In the study context, language is a human capital asset that connects refugees not only to potential financial assets in the form of work opportunities, but also to social assets in the form of potential intermediaries for help. Language skills, and the increased social power that comes with them, allow refugees to better engage with others, a requirement to moving on in a new place, as a lead political activist describes:

How can I reach the next level, how can I promote self-esteem, or how can I engage with my counterpart, society? This includes language acquisition, education. Yes? Education in general, but it begins with language acquisition, the language acquisition I need to communicate in the country I am in. (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017)

Confirming this notion, representatives from the BAA maintain that “good language is the entry ticket” to success, and without it, refugees will fail at every chance at an introductory point to the labor market (Field notes, municipal information event for volunteers, April 5, 2018). Only with language knowledge can refugees become fully independent (Interview with professional translator, March 26, 2018), as they cannot reasonably or easily find their way around bureaucratic systems otherwise (Interview with municipal police officer, March 8, 2018). An economist underscores the same necessity of language without exception, even to have a chance to enter into low-skilled work:

The first big problem with the refugees is the language skills. For gainful employment in Germany, even in the simple areas, it is absolutely a prerequisite to understand work instructions, communication and feedback. And that's a problem that can be solved, but it just takes time. As long as basic German language skills are not there, entry into the labor market will not work at all. (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018)

Even previous skills are generally irrelevant without language ability, as confirmed by volunteers discussing Mr. SM's case. He relays questions to volunteers at a networking event about if he might apply his previous skills cooking and owning restaurants to find similar work in Germany. The answer is that language knowledge is a key component of economic agency:

As the table [at the networking cafe] fills up and as she overhears two other volunteers talking about job issues with another single refugee in attendance, Mrs. R says to the volunteers at her table, “Is there somebody who has some ideas about this or connections? Somebody ought to talk to this man here [she gestures to Mr. SM]. He also needs work. He used to be a cook and has skills in this area. Surely there is a way he could also do that here.”

“But, he doesn’t speak very good German, “the old male volunteer from previously answers. “And well, that is the problem. Without B1, not much is possible. That is required.” (Field notes, May 2, 2018)

Refugees in the study context are not unaware of this necessity. Learning German is a human capital need that dominates much of daily activity. Some individuals are pursuing this full-time, as they attend the mandatory language instruction as part of government integration courses. Some are on the second iteration of courses after being unable to pass the B1 language exam after the first post-course attempt. Others are just beginning, once their children have secured places in kindergarten. Others, who are ineligible for integration courses or tending to children, often seek other ways for learning. They attend volunteer classes or seek volunteer tutors. They attend language cafes. They study by themselves. They are keenly aware, that without German, they face little prospect of reaching work-related goals. It does not matter if the goals are simpler or more ambitious, or their backgrounds lowly or educated. German language is necessary to move forward, as shown through the similarities from conversations with diverse participants:

(Mrs. H5, a married, late-30s female from Afghanistan, who was a garment factory worker and whose family is appealing an application rejection) First, I need to finish German. I need to learn and understand better. Once I can understand everything, then after, maybe I can work. (Field notes, April 17, 2018)

(JY, a single, mid-20s, Iraqi Yazidi man, who left university and who has a 2-year subsidiary protection status) I think in Germany there are many paths to take for a profession. I could try to go to a university or to a school like that, or I could just do a training program [*Ausbildung*]. I don’t want to decide yet because I just need to do German first. Then, we’ll see. (Field notes, April 26, 2018)

(Mrs. M1, married, mid-30s female from Syria, who was a homemaker with grade school education and whose family has a 1-year subsidiary protection status) Mrs. M1 asks rhetorically why she cannot work. She says she wishes that she could work or more easily go places, but cannot because she doesn’t speak good German. “I stay here,” she says. “My husband goes to the Job Center and to school. But I stay here. I want work, but I cannot speak German.” (Field notes, July 17, 2017)

(A3, a widowed, early-30s female, fully recognized refugee from Syria, who was a lawyer) The first step, I suppose, I would start studying German. I need to start the next part of what I need to do. I know I should do this because people here don’t like English, you see? They do not want to use it. I know the first step is language, but it is really hard to see beyond this. (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018)

Language ability is inherently tied to work prospects for all the refugees I speak to. It is understandably difficult for them to conceptualize the ability to work without language because it is rare to reach the point of sustainable work without it. Language as an asset is sought not only because it offers a higher chance at stability, but the mere possibility to see a more viable future, as Mrs. M1 explains acutely:

“We cannot get 3-year papers.” [When asked to clarify,] she wipes away some tears. She says, “No, it is not possible right now. Only 1-year papers. Then, maybe we can get 2-year papers, only if we speak German good enough and if we can get jobs. Then maybe. I hope so, but I am still very unsure. Germany is good, they help everybody. But, we just don’t know about it later.” (Field notes, February 19, 2018)

Ultimately, in the study context, the focus of refugees’ material pursuits has shifted to be more existential. Individuals describe how pursuits become less about alleviating basic material suffering, that is, a lack of food, shelter or critical household supplies. Rather, the concern is finding ways to rebuild material life holistically and return to the psychological stability and familiarity that comes with financial roots, familial provision, progression and general security. As such, the agency components required to do so are

multifaceted, comprising a variety of material and immaterial components. Emerging in the study context, they consist of the rote financial resources refugees have to create their desired material realities. But they also include human capital skills such as language knowledge, and psychological assets such as determination or motivation that can assist with moving forward to build a more independent existence.

6.2 Economic governmental institutional structures and limitations

Directives of federal government action with respect to legal opportunity structures in the economic domain are constructed on humanitarian principles to avoid extreme measures of destitution like starvation and homelessness. Aligning with the Refugee Convention that in “moral, legal and material spheres, refugees need the help of suitable welfare services,” (Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951), the German constitution guarantees that all foreigners legally residing in Germany, including refugees, have the right to a “dignified minimum existence” (BVerfG, 2012, 1 BvL 10/10, Para. 3). In principle, the premise of these more robust socioeconomic welfare structures is to “enable the acquisition of a livelihood through a freely chosen pursuit” (SGB I, Section 1). At the same time, as experts’ experiences and local documentary sources explain, the functioning of these provisioning structures has been challenged due to the fluctuating numbers of individuals who required support in situations of acute emergency. In the local study context, this has made commitments to better provisioning standards difficult to uphold and sometimes inconsistent to administer within shelter spaces, making situational uncertainties and measures of operational effectiveness structural qualities shaping agency factors.

6.2.1 Humanitarian ideals in welfare and labor market policy

Those arriving in Germany through asylum channels tend to do so with little in the way of material or financial goods. Most of these were left behind or depleted in flight. Although some have family already in Germany who might seem to be anchor points for initial material assistance, this not a universal or guaranteed source of support. Among the participants, family connections mentioned are often distant, or relatives have their own financial concerns to worry about. Relatives are often in different cities with few practical means to provide much specific help. As Mrs. F2, a former Afghani grade school math teacher with a 1-year subsidiary status, family often has “no interest in helping us, no interest in checking in to see how it is going with us. They have done nothing for us” (Interview with Mrs. F2, February 9, 2018). By her perception, and that of many others, they are truly alone when they arrive.

As such, welfare schemes fulfill the basic material components of agency when there is no other reasonable way to do so. From the time refugees arrive in Germany, they are supported through systems of shelters and governmental offices to receive the means to keep them from homelessness and destitution. “This [task] is the first thing,” that is, a primary acknowledged obligation of the state to “provide certain structures” and “material things, at a reasonable level” (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017). Compared to constructs in between the 1990s and early 2000s, welfare provisioning for refugees reached more expansive levels by the time of the study years. Changes have promoted a more fundamentally humanitarian approach that at least helps refugees avoid destitution and provides for at least a basic level of care and well-being, as the following sections on legal provisioning describe specifically.

6.2.1.1 Entitlements to basic subsistence

What is provided to both asylum seekers and recognized refugees consists of monetary welfare payments, physical benefits in kind, health care and shelter.⁹⁶ What is provided, when it is provided, and by whom it is provided depends on a variety of factors to include (primarily) an individual’s legal status (being

⁹⁶ The agency, opportunity structure and empowerment dynamics of shelter spaces are reviewed separately in Chapter 7, which contextualizes these interplays in the sociocultural domain of domestic and community living.

an asylum seeker or tolerated person versus a recognized refugee in some capacity) and where an individual is living (type of shelter or accommodation). AsylbLG outlines the disbursement of “basic benefits” for asylum seekers and tolerated persons, specifically intending to account for costs for food, accommodation, heating, clothing and household goods (AsylbLG, Section 3). Benefits for recognized refugees, on the other hand, are handled via the unemployment welfare schemes that apply to working-aged Germans and other legal migrants, that is, primarily SGB II. Provisioning responsibilities are shared across different actors (Appendices G and H), with TSOs assisting both as government contract providers and in citizen-driven, grass-roots capacities (Gluns, 2018c; Gluns & Grabbe, 2018).

Over time, provisioning for all groups has become more expansive (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 68). AsylbLG was first introduced in accordance with the Asylum Compromise of 1993 that aimed to restrict the perceived ease and benefits of obtaining refugee status at the time. Originally acting as an unofficial migration deterrent, the act emphasized the provision of a minimum level of benefits in kind as opposed to cash, that is, personal articles and food distributed in mass accommodation centers (Gluns, 2018c). Benefits were provided “at a minimum level only” (Bosswick, 2000, p. 51) as a disincentive to reduce the number of new asylum seekers (Petzold & Spannagel, 2013). The result of these minimal benefits was a state of more acute material exclusion for asylum seekers and refugees (Ette, 2017, p. 201), especially as further legislation through 1998 continued to restrict benefits and work access by legal status and limited them, in some cases, to the “bare necessities” of living (Bosswick, 2000, p. 52).

But in 2012, the Federal Constitutional Court found the procedures for setting low benefit rates for asylum seekers unconstitutional, partly because the benefits scheme had not been changed since 1993, but primarily because all foreigners residing in Germany have the right to a “dignified minimum existence” (BVerfG, 2012, 1 BvL 10/10, Para. 3). The court also clarified that minimum existence standards could not be violated in the name of policies aiming to keep “benefits for asylum seekers and refugees low in order to avoid incentives for migration” (BVerfG, 2012, 1 BvL 10/10, Para. 95). These recent changes have underscored the state’s constitutional obligation to ensure the security of residents’ physical existence, along with a minimum participation threshold in social, cultural and political life (Gluns, 2018c, p. 1).

In compliance with these humanitarian obligations, provisioning structures in Cologne routinely provide both cash and in-kind benefits to those in all stages of the asylum process (Gluns, 2018b, p. 13). In-kind benefits include cafeteria catering, clothing and other personal care supplies provided directly via shelter accommodations. Although AsylbLG states that benefits in kind are preferred, some level of cash benefits nonetheless helps ensure the provision of “the personal needs of everyday life” (AsylbLG, Section 3.1). Material provisions for asylum seekers and tolerated persons are rooted in the principles of SGB XII, which defines regulations for basic benefits of livelihood support.⁹⁷ Based on their family status, and whether or not they are living in private or government accommodation, asylum seekers and tolerated persons are eligible for the monetary allotments shown in Table 16. After 15 months⁹⁸ of the asylum process, and provided that all legal requirements have been met given the current residency status,⁹⁹ the allotments increase to those provided under SGB II.¹⁰⁰ Asylum seekers and tolerated persons are generally

⁹⁷ This is often referred to as “social help” (*Sozialhilfe*), welfare for those with permanently reduced earning capacity.

⁹⁸ In August 2019, this period of waiting was lengthened to 18 months.

⁹⁹ For example, AsylbLG Section 2 exempts those with toleration status who have been found to have illegally influenced the duration of their stay.

¹⁰⁰ In August 2019, legislation (*Zweites Gesetz zur besseren Durchsetzung der Ausreisepflicht*) passed to encourage more successful enforcement of deportations of those with failed asylum claims. Additional changes to AsylG and AsylbLG were also undertaken. One change lengthened the waiting period for full social help to 18 months. Another mandated longer stays at initial government accommodation centers.

not entitled to child benefit payments (*Kindergeld*).¹⁰¹ If asylum seekers have income or capital at their disposal, the act requires them to exhaust these resources before benefits apply (AsylbLG, Section 7), although this provision is irregularly and inconsistently enforced (Kalkmann, 2019). SGB II benefits for recognized refugees are somewhat more generous monetarily¹⁰² (Table 17), and recognized refugees are also entitled to child benefit payments (BAA, 2018b). Recognized refugees also receive separate monetary support to pay for accommodation, if they are either unemployed or unable to pay for housing with their income (Table 18) (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2016).

SHELTER	SINGLE	PARTNER	HH, > 18	HH, 14–17	HH, 6–14	HH, < 6
Living in government accommodation	€135	€122	€108	€76	€83	€79
Living outside government accommodation	€354	€318	€284	€276	€242	€214

Table 16. Monthly cash entitlements for asylum seekers and tolerated persons, based on AsylbLG. Payments per person depend on accommodation type, along with age of household (HH) members. Amounts show 2018 rates, current in fieldwork time.

SINGLE	PARTNER	HH, > 18–25	HH, 14–17	HH, 6–14	HH, < 6
€416	€374	€332	€316	€296	€240

Table 17. Monthly cash entitlements for recognized refugees, based on SGB II. Payments per person depend on age of household (HH) members. Amounts show 2018 rates, current in fieldwork time.

SINGLE	PARTNER	HH, 3	HH, 4	HH, 5	PER ADDITIONAL
€522	€633	€753	€879	€1004	€126

Table 18. Monthly housing entitlement (*Wohngeld*) based on number of total household (HH) members, according to the Housing Benefit Act (*Wohngeldgesetz*, WoGG). Cologne is considered in the highest bracket for payment (level VI). Amounts show rates, current in fieldwork time, legally set as of January 1, 2016.

The welfare system also accounts for the provisioning of healthcare benefits for those in all stages of the asylum process. Again, rooted in humanitarian principles of provisioning, Germany is “obligated to ensure the health of all persons on its territory [...] as an element of their human rights,” per multiple European and international directives (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 2). Specifically, EU member states must ensure that those within the asylum process receive the necessary health care to include emergency care and treatment of acute illness and serious mental disorders (EU Reception Standards Directive 2013/33/EU, 2013). As such, AsylbLG allows for asylum seekers and tolerated persons “benefits in case of illness, pregnancy and birth” (Section 4) and other benefits necessary to safeguard health or fundamental means of existence (Section 6). After 15 months, asylum seekers receive the public insurance benefits of unemployed Germans per SGB XII. Tolerated persons, however, are always restricted to receiving the acute, emergency and other limited health services outlined in AsylbLG. Recognized refugees, per SGB V, are entitled to access the public insurance system under the same conditions as Germans.

¹⁰¹ Per certain federal tax provisions, asylum seekers or tolerated persons who are employed under certain conditions and are from Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro or Bosnia-Herzegovina can receive this benefit (Flüchtlingsrat Niedersachsen, 2018).

¹⁰² Recognized refugees who are unable to work at least three hours a day due to illness, disability or other incapacitating factors like old age are provided different welfare payments through the SGB XII scheme.

Because the burden of health care funding and delivery rests primarily with municipalities (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 3), practical access to care across Germany is highly varied, especially for asylum seekers, across different states. In Cologne, however, more streamlined access to health care was prioritized early within crisis years in order to “take an important step in supporting the integration efforts” of all refugee migrants according to the mayor (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2017a, para. 10). Prior to 2016, the social welfare office was required to issue pre-authorization certificates for any type of health treatment. This process created an enormous bureaucratic processing burden (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2017a), but also raised questions about the relevance and fairness of non-medical professionals (namely, bureaucrats or shelter personnel) determining whether access to treatment was warranted or not (Kalkmann, 2019, p. 85). As a solution, Cologne adopted the use of a pre-authorized insurance card which asylum seekers and tolerated persons could use to pursue health needs directly within guidelines. The Health Minister of NRW supported and praised the provisioning approach because it prioritized both the needs of city administrators and refugee migrants in the city: “It improves health care for refugees and relieves bureaucracy and costs within the city administration. We wanted to make this win-win situation possible” (Stadt Köln - Amt für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2017a, para. 8).

The allowances of AsylbLG cover psychological care and certain therapy with pre-authorization, and access to these care options expands under SGB XII. Cologne has attempted to increase the practical availability of psychological care by establishing a municipal pool of medical interpreters, along with offering more grants to TSOs to provide psychological services and counseling (Stadt Köln, 2017a, p. 17, 20). At the same time, a generalized lack of qualified interpreters and trauma specialists, along with high levels of bureaucratic discretion in granting requests for care (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 9), have still led to difficulties accessing relevant psychological services, especially early on in the asylum process.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, along with their role in supporting health services, TSOs and voluntary groups have played a critical role in offering significant amounts of material, social and other supportive aid to improve standards of living for refugee migrants, especially within shelter environments. In Cologne, the enthusiasm for help has been substantiated due to Cologne’s broader history of promoting a robust civic engagement culture (Gluns, 2018b, p. 20). As a city, Cologne acknowledges the necessity and importance of TSO provisioning with regards to the welfare of refugees, and the scale, use and pertinence of TSO endeavors has grown over time (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018). As such, municipal (and often state) funds have generously subsidized them as the city administration views these organizations as partners in provisioning (Stadt Köln, 2017b) who help refugees “build a bridge into this society” (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018). The city continues to emphasize and make further financial commitments to the “strengthening and support of the welcome initiatives, as well as the advisement and coordination of volunteer work” (Stadt Köln, 2017c, p. 5). Municipal reporting goes so far as to codify the importance of this ancillary support in city council documentation. It acknowledges the critical role of volunteer provisioning in that it “support[s] refugees in finding their way around Germany and Cologne, and, finally, strengthens the new immigrants to unearth their potential in their new life situations” (Stadt Köln, 2017a, p. 46).

TSOs provide a vast range of material and economic services in Cologne. Especially during initial emergency times, larger TSOs (such as Caritas, Diakonie or the German Red Cross), along with local welcome initiatives, have coordinated material donations of clothing and basic household items. As time and material needs have progressed, these channels have evolved to provide larger-scale household goods such as school supplies, bicycles, computers, furniture and kitchen equipment. Other TSOs act more as special interest service groups, providing educational, familial, health or vocational support measures to refugees, sometimes based on origin country or legal status. Other offerings include skills-related classes that volunteers conduct in shelters, such as language classes, computer familiarization or resume building.

Some implementational effectiveness can be acknowledged in the sense that these welfare provisioning frameworks have offered fundamental sustenance. “[When] a refugee comes to Germany,” explains one economist, “his sociocultural subsistence minimum is secured, which, incidentally, is often higher than the average earnings in the United States or origin countries” (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018). These provisions have avoided wide-scale extreme outcomes such as starvation, mass homelessness or grave destitution; by this measure, especially in Cologne, the frameworks have worked out very well, due to such humanitarian premises (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018).

6.2.1.2 Expanding labor market access

The development of labor market access for those within the asylum process is expanding to become somewhat more inclusive, as policy makers internalize that “participation in work is [...] real participation in normal life” (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017). InteG brought about changes to previously more restrictive policies. It was viewed by the country’s leaders as a progressive “milestone,” “a paradigm shift” and a compromise that would better support refugee migrants’ success if they provided effort in return (Knight, 2016, paras. 1, 3). Such national policy shifts have generally advanced efforts to expand integration through work, as a research economist explains:

There had been a huge influx of refugees in 1992, 1993 in the years since the reunification, but this influx was sharply curtailed with changes to the Asylum Law in 1993. [...] It was in fact a process that was already started, that is, the regulatory or legal framework has been changing. So, in 1992, 1993, one could say [the intent] was to scare off refugees as much as possible. But, then later came the idea that they really ought to get access to the labor market, to the education system if they are recognized. So, these conditions have been gradually eased over the last few years. The Integration Act was one step. [...] With the significant changes in the recent past, it is becoming easier for integration. (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018)

Many recent changes, including those of InteG, have focused on opening the labor market and related support measures to previously restricted groups. Before 2013, the waiting period for asylum seekers to access the labor market was one year, and between 2013 and 2014, nine months (Kalkmann, 2014). In September 2014, this initial prohibition on work was shortened to only three months for asylum seekers and persons with a toleration status. Citizen priority checks for these groups (in which local and federal labor authorities review whether or not qualified German or EU citizens are available for the position instead) were also limited to the first 15 months of stay (BMI, 2014). In 2016 with InteG, priority checks were abolished completely for a 3-year time period in Cologne and 22 other employment districts¹⁰³ in NRW. It also allowed for reduced waiting times to access integration courses and expanded their availability.

Labor market access, however, is still regulated differently based on divisions such as legal status, time in country, origin country and locality. Asylum seekers and those with tolerated status face more restrictive conditions than those with a recognized status. In the first three months of their time in Germany, asylum seekers are not allowed to work (AsylG, Section 61.2). Those who are obliged to remain in initial state reception centers upon arrival are also not permitted to work while living in these shelters (AsylG, Section 47.1, 61.1). After, asylum seekers and tolerated persons must apply with the local Foreigners’ Authority for a permit to work, if they find specific employment (AsylG, Section 61.2; AufenthG, Section 39.2). Self-employment is not permitted for asylum seekers or tolerated persons (BAMF, 2017c, p. 5). Asylum seekers or tolerated persons from safe countries of origin, who submitted applications after August 31, 2015, are prohibited from any work (AufenthG, Section 60a.6).

¹⁰³ In NRW, the exemption districts were Bochum, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Oberhausen and Recklinghausen, due to the presence of specific specialized industries and employment rates.

On the other hand, refugees who receive a formal recognition status have unrestricted access to the labor market (AufenthG, Section 25.1-2), to include self-employment. However, an obligation to live in the area where social benefits are received means that approvals to move for a specific job opportunity are often required (AufenthG, Section 12a.5). This was a change established with InteG in 2016 to prevent refugees from flocking to areas with more economic opportunity and possibly burdening some areas unfairly (Gesley, 2016). This has been a point of contention in the advocacy efforts of refugee rights groups (Knight, 2016). Refugees whose status is a ban on deportation still require work permit approval in some circumstances (Genge, 2019, p. 21–22). InteG also opened some vocational training programs and related monetary support measures for asylum seekers and tolerated persons, eliminating the previous age cut-off of 21 and reducing waiting periods to as short as three months, depending on specific conditions.¹⁰⁴ This marked a strong, more inclusive policy shift from many years of vocation training restrictions (Grabbe, 2018, p. 10). In any case, InteG also provided incentive towards reaching independent work in granting stable residency status for the duration of employment or employment training programs.¹⁰⁵ The Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs identified these changes¹⁰⁶ as a “building blocks for the successful integration of the people who have come to us and want to get on their feet” (BMAS, 2016a, para. 3).

Access to government-supported training and education measures is separated similarly by status, but has been expanded overall. Since recognized refugees are entitled to the same benefits legally as German citizens, they have full access to all passive and active market policies administered via welfare programs and Job Center initiatives (BAMF & EMN, 2016, p. 8; Genge, 2019, p. 27–28). The primary employment readiness initiative for refugees is an integration course,¹⁰⁷ consisting of 600 hours of German language instruction and 100 hours of instruction on German history, culture and the civic system. The aim of the language course is to pass a German exam for foreigners, which certifies language ability at the A2-B1 level. Recognized refugees are obliged to take part in these courses (AufenthG, Section 44a; BAMF & EMN, 2016, p. 15). Certain asylum seekers may also take part in the courses, if space allows.¹⁰⁸ For tolerated persons, access is granted by exception locally on a case-by-case basis (AufenthG, Section 60a.2).

Job counseling and support measures, offered through the local employment agencies and Job Centers, are also meant to assist recognized refugees and some asylum seekers in receiving recognition of foreign degrees and qualifications when applicable. The Recognition Act of 2012 (*Anerkennungsgesetz*, BQFGEG) offered the legal right to have qualifications evaluated for equivalency at the federal level.¹⁰⁹ To support these efforts, the IQ Netzwerk, an EU and federally funded program in all states, has expanded as a project-based task force meant to improve job market opportunities through better integration of foreign

¹⁰⁴ See Genge (2019, p. 27–28) for expanded details on specific measures and programs. SGB III, Sections 51, 75, 122 and 130 also outline eligibility conditions.

¹⁰⁵ Additional time on the residency status is allotted to find permanent employment once a training program ends. These residency measures are also applicable to asylum seekers and tolerated persons (InteG, Section 1).

¹⁰⁶ At the same time, a controversial change of InteG was the creation of the so-called “1-Euro” job scheme, which could compel asylum seekers to take up remedial work within shelter or public-works contexts compensated at € .80 per hour, with little likelihood that this would lead to future meaningful employment (Deutsche Welle, 2016). This initiative has not led to huge increases in refugee employment rates in the years since adoption (BAA, 2019a).

¹⁰⁷ Information on Cologne integration courses was taken from the city website of one of the primary course providers, VHS Köln (<https://vhs-koeln.de/Artikel/titelIntegrationskurse/cmx5485a09e61a25.html>).

¹⁰⁸ According to AufenthG, Section 45a, asylum seekers must meet certain conditions to take part in integration courses. They must not come from safe countries of origin. They must have entered before August 1, 2019 and must be permitted to stay in Germany at least three months. They must also be appropriately registered with the local Employment Agency or be formally employed or in training.

¹⁰⁹ The act supports greater evaluation of equivalency for professions regulated by federal guidelines. Specifically, the act accounts for evaluation in “84 regulated occupations (including the craft trades where a license and possession of a master craftsman qualification is required in order to operate a company) and 519 nonregulated occupations (i.e., the 330 dual training occupations and 180 advanced training occupations” governed by the Crafts and Trade Code (*Handwerksordnung*, HwO) and the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*, BBiG) (Konle-Seidl, 2017, p. 11).

credentials in accordance with relevant federal law (BAMF & EMN, 2016, p. 15). Equivalencies are regulated for some degrees and professions by both EU and German federal directives. States are responsible for passing their own directives to govern a variety of others (Gluns, 2018a). Trade and professional associations also have local authority to administer skills equivalence testing and determine certification requirements. In Cologne, the state Professional Qualification Assessment Act (*Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz*, BQFG) gives the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Industrie- und Handelskammer*), along with the Chamber of Crafts (*Handwerkskammer*), authority in regulating professional qualifications when separate state laws do not. These structures are part of Germany's dual vocational education and training system, which intertwines secondary and post-secondary education with job-specific skills training and structured work experience in multi-year programs that ready trainees for entry into specific professions.

These primary framework conditions for labor market access have been expanding, as both political and business actors are acknowledging the dual-sided benefits of refugee migrants' successful integration into work; not only does it have the potential to address certain gaps in the labor market (Kiziak, Sixtus, & Klingholz, 2019, p. 5), but also to increase individual agency, independence and ultimately, well-being. The mindset of municipal governance actors in Cologne is not different, as they understand and promote, at least in principle, the importance of supporting inclusive work-and training-related integration of refugees. As early as 2011, the city attempted to provide access to more job counseling, qualification and training services (Stadt Köln, 2011). As the crisis years have progressed, city officials are attempting to maintain a similar course of action, rooted in these broad ideals of humanitarianism and inclusion:

The near goal is Maslow's need hierarchy. [...] First of all, just bare survival, sleeping, eating and warmth. Then at some point there will be integration: contacts; social networks; professional, linguistic and cultural qualifications. Health is still an aspect of it. Yes, and then at some point, an evolution to consider self-responsibility and self-efficacy and quality of life in the highest sense. (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018).

The city leader's characterization is in line with municipal guidelines, in which the approach to support in Cologne for those within all stages of the asylum process is theoretically "based on individual needs and pursues the goal of promoting peaceful coexistence in the community" (Stadt Köln, 2004, p. 14). City leaders at least presume the importance of structures that would support more self-efficacious economic change in refugees' lives:

Roofs over their heads, food, clean clothes are there first. The next thing is qualification, integration courses. Then some time after, what follows is work, and from there comes normal living. (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018)

Support for training, education and work measures can mean progression forward, especially for those individuals who have often remained welfare dependent for years of stay. This is seen as a positive way to encourage more stability in the lives of refugee migrants, along with productive contributions to local communities, and they are points that city administration acknowledges are critical for ongoing development efforts (Interview with leader, municipal Foreigners' Authority, January 12, 2018).

6.2.2 Provisioning uncertainty in times of emergency

At the same time, despite the humanitarian premise, a context of uncertainty affects the execution of welfare and labor market policy to best meet the changing needs of all those within different stages of the asylum process. Rather than seeming to originate from rote oppositions to the financial and educational support for these individuals, operational challenges stem partly from the contextual instability of the influx years, as discussed similarly in the previous chapter.

In the study context, the uncertainty regarding the very scale of economic provisioning need at the local level appears difficult to contend with in application. Beginning as early as 2014, the number of refugee migrant arrivals grew so quickly beyond existing projections that even the federal immigration authorities could “not offer any official forecast that could be the basis of municipal-level action” (Stadt Köln, 2017a, p. 6). Instead, the city was relegated to operating in a reactionary state, in which emergency needs took precedence to be dealt with acutely and future needs could only be planned for more abstractly. When provisioning must provide for the basic needs of an undetermined number of people, arriving in quick succession, long-term planning for more holistic, integrative economic life is simply not possible. Only when “it is much quieter [and] the storm is more or less past” can the focus on accounting for the basic needs of an ever-changing number of people shift to “concentrate more on the people who are here, work together more closely and pay more specific attention” to their more advanced needs (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018). Only as the acuteness of the situation diminishes can the nature of provisioning shift with it, as a TSO consultant explains:

We are actually experiencing a change right now. We are no longer in the situation of constantly talking about a crisis or being told we are in an emergency situation where we are standing with our backs against the wall and need to accommodate people no matter what the conditions. Compared to the time when we really felt the fire under us, during this crisis intervention time, we are over that, and this is actually also true from the perspective of the city, with whom we cooperate closely. (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018)

Relevant local governance actors discuss how they understand that the refugee situation in Cologne is shifting to a non-emergency status quo and thus are beginning to acknowledge that approaches to welfare management and economic life must change with it. “The city is on a better track [...] because the situation has stabilized,” explains a municipal leader overseeing integration work (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017). In 2015, the city attempted to negotiate distribution and financial reimbursement criteria with the state due to “objectively, factually fewer options to establish residential accommodation” (Stadt Köln, 2015b, p. 9–10). But looking further past just the provision of basic survival needs, city governance documents also underscore the emergence of advancing and existential livelihood needs, but also that resources are still often strained to provide them:

In addition to the creation of adequate accommodation facilities, the coverage for necessary needs of nutrition, clothing, health care and household goods, as well as the provision of benefits in case of illness, pregnancy and childbirth for around 4,000 communities of need, is required to offer those who have traveled to Cologne a basic livelihood subsistence. To cope with this interagency challenge, urban efforts will be further intensified to create both human and spatial capacity for proper care of the aforementioned people. On the basis of the current allocations, the administration sees a steadily growing need for further human and spatial action. The administration is already reaching its limits in the acquisition of qualified personnel and urgently required space resources. The pressure to act will continue to increase with future leveling of high numbers of arrivals. (Stadt Köln, 2015b, p. 11)

In the local context, advancing needs require further resources and more detailed political planning and consideration. Although there is somewhat more stability in the number of people who require benefits, how to best provision for more existential needs is still a pressing institutional question with unclear answers. “It was helpful when the municipal administration began to ask, how much does the total picture cost?” explains a former member of the city Integration Council (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017). Spending and reacting to the urgency of emergency requests was financially difficult in the past, but less administratively or emotionally complicated than “firing up the whole political thought process” to form a holistic plan from the start (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017). The municipal refugee coordinator concurs:

These [resource] consequences should have been made clear. Money. We spend money, without end. At the moment, the city is spending a huge amount of money on provisioning support for refugees. It is somewhat feasible in the here and now. But the difficulties are with the overall society infrastructure; these people will simply not leave after a couple of years. They need schools, kindergartens, apartments, judges, teachers; these are all the needs people have. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

As such, how specifically local institutional structures will advance and provide these various types of advancing economic needs remains in and of itself fundamentally uncertain. On the one hand, the necessity of material provisioning for refugees has been cemented within the courts at a federal level. “It is not merely a question of economics,” explains an economist from the German Economic Institute, because “the Federal Constitutional Court ultimately says that [welfare schemes] are constructed so that they secure the socio-cultural subsistence level, and the sociocultural subsistence minimum must be secured by all persons” (Interview with economist, German Economic Institute, March 27, 2018).

At the same time, especially since 2015, governance actors at all levels have debated the extent to which extensive benefits schemes act as “pull factors” for the arrival of additional refugees (Kiziak et al., 2019, p. 20) and provide support unjustifiably beyond what legal frameworks and court decisions require. Subsistence-driven safeguards have generally prevented long-term abject destitution, but increasingly high numbers of arriving refugees have also taxed the provisioning system overall. This has fueled social and political debates¹¹⁰ about the nature of what ought to be provided going forward, in part driven by:

[...] perceptions that refugees are ungrateful and that they are becoming more and more entitled, that they keep getting more and more things and they are becoming more satisfied with what they have. People are thinking, they already receive a lot, so why do they need more? (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018)

As an ongoing solution, in the local context, the city capitalizes on TSO and volunteer services to fill support gaps, but this is not an entirely effective solution without its own resource challenges and operational uncertainties (Chapter 5, Sections 5.2.2-3; Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3.2). While the city government acknowledges the administrative and resource burden that TSO activity alleviates, especially during times of shortfall (Stadt Köln, 2017a), over time, this produces an over reliance on such services and an avoidance measure to avoid addressing more permanent ways of advanced provisioning and economic integration measures (Bloch & Schuster, 2016, p. 398). As city funding grows to place more economic support and integration responsibility on TSOs, at the same time, the numbers and enthusiasm of volunteers is simultaneously decreasing, as more is being demanded of them (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018).

Additionally, the existence of various TSO initiatives does not mean they provide livelihood services or material support equally or that all refugees have equal access to them, even in a city like Cologne with a robust civic engagement culture. From observations and themes emerging from interviews, what additional material aid (to include benefits in kind and support with various social services) largely depends on the volunteer and TSO presence within the specific communities and shelters where refugees live, along with whether or not there are effective ways to communicate how and where to access different types of material help. Limited numbers of volunteers and available resources they can provide mean that not every shelter or community affords access to the same types of help.

¹¹⁰ Such debates are not without some justification. Costs to provide for refugees have been much higher than expected. According to estimates, the German government spent over €20 billion in 2016 with respect to material care and integration provisioning (Dearden, 2017). This figure was almost 20% over planned budgets. Costs in 2017 remained similar (Der Spiegel, 2016). Other estimates predict that annual costs could rise as high as €55 billion by 2022 (Diekmann, 2016). Projections suggest that it may take 10–15 years before refugees can produce a positive effect on national budgets (European Commission, 2016a).

Similar resource-driven and executional uncertainty exists with regards to the provisioning of employment support measures. Despite the entitlement to and continually emphasized importance of integration courses, their availability across the country is one area of frequent shortage (Rietig, 2016, p. 5), often requiring months-long wait times to attend (Associated Press, 2017). In Cologne, demand for differing language needs is difficult to meet, despite over 600 different language classes offered through municipal programs and additional programs supported through state-level efforts for asylum seekers with unclear statuses to remain (Gluns, 2018b, p. 12). Because language courses outside of official integration courses are often targeted towards specific types of work-related needs, it is often practically difficult to match refugees with these additional courses, given the individuality of each individual legal case of work authorization or eligibility and the coordination of many responsible provisioning actors (the Job Center, Integration Point and local Foreigners' Authority) (Gluns, 2018b, p. 10). Additionally, many courses lack appropriate childcare, so women with young children at home, who are waiting to receive places in childcare facilities (also with long wait times), must delay the start of their learning (Interview with Red Cross shelter volunteer, January 19, 2018). As such, many shelters and volunteer groups attempt to provide informal classes as a stop-gap, but these classes are often scheduled infrequently or simply do not cover material advanced enough to be of significant use (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018).

General eligibility for access to the courses has been uncertain in and of itself.¹¹¹ It was only in 2016 that BAMF opened integration course eligibility to asylum seekers coming from countries calculated to have high prospects for a positive asylum decision. Those from other countries must generally wait to attend integration courses until their cases are adjudicated or local discretionary positions are granted (or available) (Genge, 2019, p. 30; Gluns, 2018a, p. 9). This wait time is especially difficult for Afghani asylum seekers, whose acceptance rates often hover just below the cutoff threshold for "high probability" eligibility (Rietig, 2016, p. 5). When decisions take months to adjudicate, uncertain and long wait times mean delays in learning fundamental skills that can provide the starting point towards future socioeconomic success. Especially when welfare money does not leave much room for discretionary spending on private language classes, conditional and uncertain access to language courses from early points in time ignores the reality that many of those cut off will still be remaining long-term and possess the need for skills in this area.

Perhaps more acute operationally is the general uncertainty that comes with rectifying adult educational gaps and pursuing qualification equivalencies beyond language skills. In part, this difficulty is due to the decentralized control that local trade associations have to regulate specific professional standards and requirements, often with various associations being responsible for regulating one profession (Rietig, 2016, p. 8–9). Additionally, technical training for many professions is highly intertwined with the secondary and post-secondary education system, in which targeted or specialized tracking begins as early as the fourth year of schooling and continues through age 18 (Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2015). While this dual training-education system is "world renowned for creating robust education to work pathways and career ladders" for Germans and natives (Rietig, 2016, p. 6), it is simultaneously difficult for outsiders to penetrate. Refugee migrants between the ages of 16 and 21 often can be subsumed by the education system to enter into training programs (Grabbe, 2018, p. 11), and various federal, state and local initiatives have focused exclusively on better ways to target, improve and integrate young refugees under 25 into existing labor market schemes (Grabbe, 2018, p. 12), Cologne included.

¹¹¹ Highlighting the overall contextual uncertainty of access to labor market support services, in August 2019 (past the fieldwork period), the eligibility criteria for integration courses changed yet again (IQ Netzwerk Niedersachsen, 2019). Becoming more restrictive, new laws cut off all access to integration courses for all asylum seekers arriving after August 2019. The high prospect to remain countries were reduced to two, Syria and Eritrea, meaning that only asylum seekers from these countries (who arrived before the cutoff date) would be eligible to access integration courses. Asylum seekers from other countries can access the courses under certain conditions, if they are able to register as unemployed or are preparing for employment. Access for tolerated persons was slightly expanded, allowing more regular access for those meeting certain job preparation conditions.

Together, these factors reduce the relevance of refugee migrants' human capital experiences, as reported generally in literature. Aside from the fact that they can infrequently obtain all the documentation demanded for equivalency evaluation, gathering, translating and waiting for their evaluation can draw out for extended periods of time, only to result in negative or partial equivalencies (Rietig, 2016, p. 9). Although skills equivalency testing is theoretically possible, it is a process used only in a limited number of professions and generally only in pilot program stages across various industries (Konle-Seidl, 2017). These conditions persist in Cologne, especially in educational arenas where local structures of education follow national directives for organization and coupling with vocational training. The uncertainty of obtaining skills equivalency, along with that of pursuing language learning, creates operating conditions in which there seem to be few practical ways to penetrate, as both a city council member and a TSO program consultant explain:

As a rule, however, qualification equivalency has to be determined, which is also very difficult with regards to integration and work because experiences do not always match work requirements. So, if there is a carpenter who has been trained here, that would not even be equivalent to a joiner [a basic technician] who had been trained in Iran or Syria because we have occupational safety standards and work regulation commissions. Factors such as this can be disruptive, but on the other hand, it is important for [refugees] to understand the mentality and situation of those in the labor market arena. (Interview with city council member, The Greens, January 9, 2018)

Everything rests with certificates. You have to prove everything, and if you do not prove it, it might as well be nonexistent. There are small-scale efforts at the employment agency. They say, "External exams can be taken, and then we can recognize [the skills]. But even here, you must be able to speak the language, so again, it all comes down to language, [...] but then there are many [individual] and psychological conditions that prevent or delay learning languages. (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018).

Additionally, in the study context, municipal actors contend with these varying resource demands, along with operational difficulties, as they question how to deal with their implications in actually attempting to improve the economic lives of refugee migrants in the city. Uncertainty is created in logistical questions about how it is possible to execute moving forward with the next stage of provisioning:

It would be ideal for us [to have] a fairer support of the communities. We have no control. We have no leverage, but ultimately have to carry all the load that arrives. We would wish for more here because we have the issue that what we need to spend on accommodating people and providing for their household needs takes away from other areas. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

The lack of leverage returns again to uncertainties at higher government levels, in that local questions await responses from fundamental national ones about what the next phases of provisioning and labor market support efforts should look like from a top-down perspective:

The legislature has not always paid attention to the fact that many refugees have already been here for a considerable time and they are integrating themselves, so labor market policy could be [better] targeted here. This [avoidance] has also happened due to political pressure regarding the economy, but their [integration potential] means it would be a mistake to send them back home. But there is simultaneously difficulty in asking, where would a pull effect begin? Should [the government] send this signal and promote arrival in higher numbers, when people would not actually have a chance to succeed or participate economically? (Interview with leader, municipal Foreigners' Authority, January 12, 2018)

Policies at higher levels lack cohesion in that they are slow to define or address fundamental questions of stay or go, integrate or segregate. Should national legal frameworks—that ultimately filter down to local ones—promote full, partial or limited economic integration possibilities? Should they offer

high, moderate or limited amounts of social welfare support? When the fundamental goals and execution models of higher-order policy are in and of themselves uncertain, it is difficult for local practitioners—be they municipal government actors, TSO workers or employers—to respond effectively to advancing economic needs, and situational uncertainty perpetuates in the local study context.

6.2.3 Operational limitations of organizational complexity

The organizational complexity of the provisioning systems has also strained local functionality in a context of uncertain operating conditions. The complexity stems from the governance of social benefits provisioning and program administration that is thoroughly and heavily segmented from the top down, as discussed in Chapter 5 within process of legal administration. The description applies in the same way in the economic domain to benefits administered directly through government channels in that federal law creates the overarching legal directives, but presumes states to make additional laws defining how they will execute and distribute other responsibilities to district and municipal localities. Localities, in turn, may form their own directives regarding how they will operate within state and federal confines. Similar organizational structure applies to welfare services or resources provided by local TSOs, which are often supported via grants, directives and lobbying efforts of their parent or collective umbrella associations interfacing at federal or state levels (Zimmer et al., 2016, p. 12). Despite the system's ubiquity, the study context highlights a consequence as such, that is, a web of multiple complicated and nested points of responsibility within legal structures of economic and material support. Although SGB and AsylbLG are legislated at the federal level, implementation falls to states, municipalities and local TSOs. Under SGB II, means-tested unemployment benefits are covered by federal funds directly, but federal funds filter to municipalities to administer housing and other related allowances for living expenses (Bendel, 2016; Gluns, 2018c). The implementation of AsylbLG benefits also falls to states, which further delegate administration responsibilities to municipalities.

In Cologne, the structure of provisioning is comprised of a variety of offices, groups and actors taking different pieces of responsibility in this regard (Appendix G). The municipal Job Center is responsible for administering monetary allowances for those under the SGB II scheme, along with services geared towards helping recognized refugees find jobs or employment training programs, whereas services provided under AsylbLG are administered by a separate municipal sub-department. In 2015, separate Integration Point offices were established in the city to combine tasks of the Job Center and the Employment Agency of Cologne (*Agentur für Arbeit Köln*) to be more directly responsible for training and enforcing employment integration measures for certain types of recognized refugees and asylum seekers, but as of 2017, the Employment Agency alone handles programs and efforts for asylum seekers from safe countries of origin (Gluns, 2018b, p. 7; Stadt Köln, 2017a, p. 43). A different municipal office oversees the provision of care for minors traveling alone. Other forms of material or job training support are provided through an extensive presence of TSOs, to include the aforementioned larger charitable organizations running shelters, in addition to local clubs, specialist non-profit organizations and 34 community-based, volunteer welcome initiatives (Budkova & Blickhäuser, 2018, p. 6). Committees of the city council frequently vote to provide funding for support programs via these channels, in addition to what is spent in line with their own direct provisioning responsibilities. This complex balancing act has led to a lack of nimbleness in being able to efficiently execute provisioning directives. As a city council member explains, especially during the onset of the highest migration inflows, the municipal government raised questions as to what level of authority should be mostly responsible for different aspects of provisioning to allow for the most effectiveness in policy execution:

The state [government] is also responsible for distributing the financial resources from the federal government to the municipalities. With this, we often have a problem in how the costs [for care provisioning] get allocated; half may be levied on the community, and only half will be paid by the federal government. This is an enormous local burden, it has been three-digit amounts in Cologne, in the millions. That burden has not functioned well. We say that the federal government should normally have to pay the costs for refugees, but at the moment, there are discussions between the

states and federal government that the federal government should take on more of the cost with regards to accommodation. With so many under the Hartz-IV scheme, it's an enormous cost burden, is it not? That the City of Cologne would have to take on 320 million Euros for accommodation costs by itself, when so many refugees are coming here via the normal federal distribution channels, but ending up under this welfare scheme. Surely this demands some alleviation of burden? [...] But at the time, in 2015, 2016, when so many refugees came, this was the directive of the federal government, [it was] quite ineffective. The government simply said, "You, municipality, you have to take care of this and that." Period. Final. Of course, there is no way for municipalities or states to really circumvent the national directive, is there? (Interview with city council member, The Left, January 8, 2018)

As time has gone on, the complexity in tasking has remained. Legal directives still come from the top down. Although the city is tasked with execution of these directives, it lacks the flexibility to most effectively operate in the local context, as described in a local Job Center meeting session between municipal authorities and volunteers:

The representative from the local Foreigners' Authority says she cannot comment on questions of eligibility or fairness with regards to labor market access because ultimately it is BAMF that handles procedures of the asylum process. In response to the situational comments of volunteers, the representative says, "This is a political question. As the local authority, we cannot work more on this theoretical question. [...] These are conditions of the law."

From the audience, [a welcome initiative leader] says, "I've had experiences with over 100 businesses in Cologne, from small to large, and nobody has ever said, these processes work well." (Field notes, April 5, 2018)

As such, even at the local level, execution requires equally as complex coordination efforts to interface among so many responsible nodes, consuming effort and energy to provide adequate care across these multiple levels. This is experienced acutely by the municipal housing office, attempting to coordinate various points of provisioning interest and need:

[There is] the range of social service providers in Cologne, which have their own networks anyway. It is a very important condition for us to try to have synergy effects because our goal is always that the refugees should get access to entitled services [...] So, there need to be ways to streamline access to childcare services, youth services, the health system, adult education opportunities and whatever else there is; it needs to be about smoothing the way, opening up channels and networking to streamline. (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

In the study context, when execution necessitates so many components amid change and uncertainty, navigating through these components becomes an arduous task of daily operating for both local bureaucrats and the city's refugee migrants more generally. In one instance, for example, a representative from the local Foreigners' Authority explains at a volunteer information event how software and database problems is preventing electronic interfacing with the Job Center (Field notes, April 5, 2018). As a result, refugees are having their welfare payments incorrectly delayed while their residence permits are being renewed because the two departments cannot systematically communicate to account for processing time. Volunteers at the event express their own frustrations, as well as confusion on behalf of the refugees they help, but the answer from the employees is simply that it is complex to interface between systems, and the issues are being addressed as best as they can be on a case-by-case basis. As one program leader from the Job Center also confirms, as does a TSO program consultant, the overall nature of welfare execution is just technical and opaque:

I don't know if you have ever seen an official notice of benefits from us, given that we are also responsible as the Job Center for administering benefits, that is, people's means of living. If you've never seen one, you'd never understand it at the first go, if I just put it in front of you. [...] I've been working for 15 years in this capacity, and there have been efforts made locally and nationwide to make the notices more readable, but [these changes] must be legally supported. So, it is still a problem that nobody understands why we bombard with so many notices. [Laughs] For every

little change; I move, there is a new notice. My rent has increased, there is a new notice. The child benefit has been administered, there is a new notice. And since [refugees] are just arriving here, there is always a high potential for very frequent change in the granting of benefits. And then, the refugees and volunteers try to ask us, they show us the piles [of forms...]. Why? [...] I think this is a problem, but it is one we cannot exactly solve locally. (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017) (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017)

Once there is the formal recognition status, then, of course there is registration at the Job Center, then the entire machine has to kick into gear. The Job Center, the Employment Agency, SGB II payments, transfer payments, job placement, just everything. There is so much to do overall, another example; the recognition of degrees. Then, there are also a lot of people who have no degrees or not much education, and they need investment programs for their own qualifications. In Germany, all this just takes a very long time. (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018).

In essence, the top-down “sharing of responsibilities” frequently described in literature has resulted in a variety of regulations, policies and operating procedures that cloud the implementation of provisioning assistance for refugees in the local context (Gluns, 2018c, p. 3). Because they are bound by operating procedures, funding and responsibility that are spread across many levels of governance and a multitude of provisioning nodes, local administrators discuss how they may find themselves struggling to adapt higher directives efficiently and effectively to the local context. Refugees, as they report, in turn struggle to understand who is responsible for what and how they can efficiently obtain what they need from the sources available, for example A3 in discussing her perceptions of how local governance structures function:

“There is an appointment here, then there. Then an error, so I must return to a completely other office.” A3 laughs [...and] says, “Sometimes, I think the government here is worse than in Syria.” She tells me that she is really struggling with dealing with the [Job Center] system here. She does not understand why it is so complicated. (Field notes, March 13, 2018)

In Cologne, a prominent TSO leader explains how this represents not just one gap to address, but rather, many simultaneously:

There are more refugees now on top of the native population. This is a situation the government needs to be aware of, so these issues are always topics at the [municipal] Round Table. We have a system of resource competition, [...] so it is clear that there are deficiencies in Cologne. [...] When we say, we need to help, that these deficiencies should be addressed, I mean that the existing structure must support [improvement] where it is really needed. The government must of course really consider this and what there are resources for. But we need additional advice centers, more capacity for staff in social services, more personnel in the government offices. Overall, more is needed within the entire system; in the Job Centers, language courses, language support. There is just a lot to do in this regard. (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017).

From the study context, the conditions of opportunity structure in the economic domain combine humanitarian principles with uncertainties in execution. What welfare and labor access laws allow for in theory is becoming more permissive, but executional qualities and implementation in the local case study context reveal operational uncertainties and complexities that have implications for empowerment outcomes. Despite the progress being made, government welfare support is still the main monetary resource avenue for the majority of refugees in the country as well as the city. How the agency-based desires to move forward to build livelihoods and psychological health interact with these qualities of structure are explained in the final section examining how participants perceive the application of their choices towards these ends.

6.3 Empowerment outcomes in the economic domain

Ultimately, in the study context, a combination of evolving assets and being able less able to apply them independently within a complex, uncertain opportunity structure has led to difficulties individually driving desired choices in the economic domain. As previously discussed, within legal frameworks, the opportunity for choice frequently exists with expanding labor market policy, but the breakdown mainly occurs at the level of executing choice and sometimes at the level of questioning the effectiveness of action. Instead, these interactions frequently require institutional intermediaries such as sympathetic government case workers or dedicated volunteers to circumvent. As also emphasized in the previous chapter, experiences highlight empowerment at a level of actors above refugees, whose success in reaching economic goals is often dependent on these relationships with these intermediaries. Those without such relationships are often left to feel as they are unable to break through towards a more existential level of material or economic satisfaction.

6.3.1 Limitations reaching evolving needs within existing structures

As a leader of a local Roma-interest TSO explains, to be empowered in the economic domain, refugees must be able to use their assets and capabilities within the opportunity structure in order to fulfill:

[...] the desire to be able to live safely and actually have what the rest of the population also has, that is, to have normal access to school, and then to have success in school, to have a normal home and to have a job, in order to be occupied and accumulate a small amount of material wealth. (Interview with leader and political advocate, Roma charity organization, January 12, 2018).

Similarly, as a prominent Cologne political activist describes, the realization of goals and application of choice in the economic domain is often difficult, given that the components of opportunity structure do not necessarily promote the accumulation and application of agency:

To move beyond [subsistence], there I see quite extensive requirements, given where we start, that is, from a person coming to Germany and being brought to an emergency shelter. (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017)

The process he describes is difficult to realize because, as previously discussed, agency and more existential goals are not easily compatible with a highly complex governing institutional system that cannot always be flexible even at the local level, such as the dual-track education-training system which cannot necessarily be modified. Individuals themselves are not the exclusive starting point for applying their choices to holistic material advancement; rather, the institutional structures determine ways for them to enter and succeed within them. A municipal TSO leader describes this interplay based on her experiences managing various socioeconomic program measures:

It is always important to consider how refugees can situate within the rule system. What I mean by the rule system is that that they need to be brought into it. Cologne is responsible, as it is for citizens, to create access points for these new residents. So that means, we need improvement in the regulation systems. (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017).

How these systems and entry points behave in reality can create conditions in which the possibility for choice exists theoretically but is difficult to reach in practicality, as a municipal leader for integration programs describes:

Maybe that [welfare dependency] might be necessary for a while because of the housing or care situation just being the way it is. But it should be a point to return to self-responsibility and self-reliance as soon as possible. It would help the situation if the laws and policies were able to support this. (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017)

For individual participants, clashes between individual goals, desired choices and qualities of the opportunity structure embody this conflict. In some cases, instability and resource inadequacy have created physical conditions of their shelter living (Chapter 7, Section 7.1.1) that impede the choice in moving forward to reach desired educational or financial opportunities. With the number of private apartments and newer, more centralized shelters limited, there are often issues with transport connections; many are located in areas with poor bus or train connections, and the timing of transportation makes classes or employment programs difficult to reach on time. A3 explains to me, for example, how she was once required to attend a mandatory Job Center event on a day when public transportation was striking and therefore not available. When pricing a taxi and realizing it would cost €120 round trip (a sum she did not have), she worries that her benefits would be taken away because she has no reasonable way to attend the event. Her solution is to ask a family member in another city to phone the Job Center on her behalf, because he speaks German and she does not, but as she recalls how she felt about this instance, she muses, “Without this, without him, [there would be] nothing! Without the train, what could I do?” (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018).

These conditions can also leave the individual participants feeling like they cannot perform at their best at their schools or jobs. Shelters, in principle, may try to offer rooms or wings for refugees who are studying in courses or working, but overcrowding often prevents the use of these quiet, more private spaces for rest or work. Although she has private sleeping quarters at the shelter where we first meet, Mrs. M1 tells me that “there is still a lot of noise [outside] and a lot of arguing that make it difficult to obtain [the] peace and quiet” needed for her and her husband to complete their German homework every night; she goes on to describe loud music and drunk fighting that can occur until late night hours, disturbing a reasonable sleep schedule for school (Field notes, July 27, 2017). A young Bangladeshi asylum seeker, VM, reports a similar experience living in an emergency shelter. His shelter technically allows an application for a private room with proof of employment, and VM has a training position with an IT firm. But space limitations initially prevent him from receiving private accommodation, until he also raises separate complaints of ethnic-based bullying, which results in the allowance to share a room with another working Bangladeshi asylum seeker.

Additionally, the nested hierarchies and delegation of economic policy execution to localities and local organizations do not necessarily result in the systematic accommodation of the skills, needs and choices of particular individuals. Instead, these complexities can empower local bureaucrats when choice exists (Chapter 5, Sections 5.2–3) and cut off clearer application of refugees’ own choices. VM’s difficulties advancing in his job are impeded when local rules do not accommodate a simple request from his employer:

He says he views a main difficulty as that “you cannot do anything freely.” For example, he says, he needed WiFi for his job because his boss wanted him to be able to work on database tasks remotely after hours. But, he realized there was no way to have internet in the shelter because the network providers would not consider the shelter a permanent address. So, he went first to the shelter officials, then to the city hall [*Rathaus*] to ask for permission and get an exception granted to get WiFi access in his room and be able to access a provider. But, both the shelter and the city hall denied him this. “I was stuck,” he says. “You need to ask the *Rathaus* permission to do anything.”

I follow up with, “How did you end up solving this problem with the Internet?” He tells me that another friend who lived in the camp found out about a special offer from O2 [cell-phone provider] where he could get a good amount of data at a high speed via his phone. So, he went to the shop to set that up.

“It’s not perfect,” he says, “but I use it for now to get by.” (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

VM's experiences are a common example of well-documented bureaucratic idiosyncrasies and complex structures noted in literature that construct barriers to executing choice in many types of work, self-improvement programs or inroads towards more financially independent living (see, for example, Kiziak et al., 2019, Trines, 2019 and Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016). Like VM, others I encounter view onerous language, training and other bureaucratic requirements difficult to overcome themselves. "Many joke," explains a Farsi translator, "that one needs a specialized training course just to clean toilets" (Conversation with translator after interview, February 9, 2018). MF, a single 23-year-old female from Syria, explains similar difficulties in reconciling these requirements from her perspective even with a high level of German language skill. She reached a level of B2 German in less than 2.5 years (a fairly quick pace) and already possesses a fully recognized refugee status. She wishes to search for training and employment opportunities, but questions the incentive she has to do so, when earnings are low, but language and professional requirements are high, even in the low-skilled contexts often pushed as avenues for refugee employment:

"I don't want to be with the Job Center forever, but I don't know about this. It's just hard to find anything to do. I have tried to do a training internship [*Praktikum*] in the past, to see if it would help me get a job."

I ask where she did her internship. She answers, "At Edeka. Do you know it? The supermarket. I was just there for two weeks. It was really physical work. I was bending over and picking up heavy boxes. I hurt all the time. And that was just the internship! I wouldn't want to do a formal *Ausbildung* [training program] there. I said to myself, no way I'm doing this. It's not worth it. With an *Ausbildung* you receive very little money, and then with that as a job, you do not even earn very much after. And you need B2 for an *Ausbildung* there. I was worried my German was not good enough. [...] I am serious. You need to prove you have B2 for an *Ausbildung* at Edeka! Without language, honestly nothing is possible here." (Field notes, May 5, 2018)

Accessing employment is another example that emerges as a constraint of choice in execution. Although refugees may be allowed access to jobs per federal law, the complexity and hierarchies of administration mean that local bureaucrats and program administrators are often put in the position to act as gatekeepers enforcing locally derived or individually determined standards for entry. Individual case workers must often themselves "determine exactly what benefits, costs or reductions [refugees] are eligible for" because each individual has unique employment, legal, language and financial statuses that different elements of the system account for in different ways (Field notes, presentation with Job Center and division leader, municipal Housing Office, March 1, 2018). The fact that relevant case workers must sort through these complex scenarios leads to the "policy-making by individual case workers during the implementation" as also mentioned in Chapter 5 (Gluns, 2018c, p. 3). VM explains how he has encountered this discretion regarding the granting of work permits. For those who still need their work petitions reviewed by the local Foreigners' Authority based on their legal statuses, VM perceives a high degree of discretion and power the case workers have in choosing whether or not to process the applications to issue a permit:

He says, "A while ago, there was one woman who was in charge of filling out the paperwork for a work permit. But she left for a while. I was unsure if she moved to a different position. But, once this person left, another person came to replace her. Once this new person came, a resident in the camp got his work permit processed in two days. Word got around to others in the camp, and suddenly many people were going to try to get the permits processed before the speed decreased or they started getting denied again." VM tells me that he is unsure if the new person actually just processed the forms quickly, but there was a perception that the time and success rate went up as it was tied to one individual worker. (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

Even so, many local government actors see less room for maneuverability applied to employment or economic structures in particular (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018). Such administrators view the broader systems of work regulation as difficult to change consistently at the local governance level, but certainly at the refugee level:

Germany is a highly industrialized country. There is little here (Assistant 1 [*interrupts*]: Simple work.) Unskilled work. And so, it needs to be made clear to people [refugees], that's not like you can arrive (Assistant 1 [*interrupts*]: And be working after three years.) After three years, find work. You have to be able to accomplish something to find work. That is part of the truth, and you have to tell people honestly. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne mayoral refugee coordination task force, October 26, 2017)

Here, it is a steadfast assertion from a local government leader that work, even after three years, is simply not possible because the nature of German work is too exclusive to include or accommodate anything other than the most tightly controlled entry requirements. But this is also an assertion based in the reality of the system's complexity and bureaucracy, which often means local program administrators are compelled to instruct refugees they work with about the actuality of their presumed lack of choices because they do not consider the bureaucratic hurdles or requirements to be negotiable, even at their municipal level:

The main task is to get realistic about what it is that people bring with them to Germany, but also about how and if it is actually applicable here. [...] But I believe that many people feeling did not give any real thoughts to the reality of this question.

[...] In Syria, you had been an engineer, but here, you're just a servicing technician. According to us, you just possess blue-collar skills. The experience you have is not considered a valid course of advanced study. Yes, another illusion people must discard. And I believe that one must simply go forth with the realistic perspective that one has in Germany. That's our main challenge here [at the Job Center], right?

[...] What did you do? "I was a hairdresser." Very often, there are people who have had a low level of education, and maybe they just have operated a simple razor or electronic hair trimmers, and they try to pass that off in Germany as having been a hair dresser. Well, these people do exist, yes, and they do not have the education to become hairdressers with us, quite frankly, they would not be able to do any training at all. [...] There is, I believe, a certain group of people here, it includes those who are likely to never ever fit within our working world. (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017)

In the study context, these experiences of governance actors show how the administrative and bureaucratic hierarchy perpetuates and remains "so structured that the Germans decide, and the refugees sit on the other side of the table and remain there. [Administrators] leave the experiences of the refugees on the side and organize everything from a German perspective, from a regulatory perspective, instead of looking at what people really need" (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018). The way of operating is in line with the assertion that refugees lack "the capacity for participation" and realizable choice because "they have often received the label of refugee" and thus do not receive acceptance "on an individual level" (Interview with legal consultants, pro-bono legal organization, November 23, 2017). In other words, in the local bureaucratic space, the role of administrators is to find ways for refugees to fit into the existing highly regimented opportunity system, not always to adjust parts of the system to refugees and the application of their own choices.

Participating refugees perceive these constraints acutely and see them as impediments to choosing to move forward. Given the frequency of interacting with Job Center and other welfare-related personnel and the necessity of compliance with administrative directives, refugees understand their interactions with administrators to be guiding them towards the options that are available to them. A3 explains to me the helplessness and futility often felt as she recalls the feeling of encountering irrelevant-seeming employment directives. She does not believe she has the power to make use of her own choice effectively:

I have a story for you. One of my friends here comes from Aleppo. She is also Syrian. She studied pharmacy in Syria and wanted to do the same here. She was very determined. She did B1. Then, the Job Center said, if you want such a training program [*Ausbildung*], do B2. So she did B2. Finally, they told her, you need C1 now. So, she did that too. Then, she thought, maybe she could finally make it to this training program. But you know, by the time she finished, she

was 40. And the Job Center told her, we are sorry, you're too old for a training program now. Maybe you might work at Rewe or DM [supermarkets]. Or you could find a café and maybe work as a waitress. What of this? [...] If I could, I would tell the Job Center to actually help, not just make more problems. I would say, they should ask, what can you do? What can you choose? They shouldn't say, you must only do this or only this. (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018)

Mrs. T2, a Serbian Roma woman with 12 children, living for over four years in Cologne with a toleration status, relays a similar feeling of resignation, as she muses about how she wishes she might be able to make something of her own personal experiences and skills in Germany, but simply feels she cannot:

Maybe one day I could try to get a diploma for my skills in French. I had to learn a lot, since we were in France so long. [...] Or I would really love to be a pediatrician or something with children and birth. I know a lot about it already, you see? I have good experience from my own life [birthing nine children]. But, I know I could never do that here. It's not possible. (Field notes, March 2, 2018)

When the participating refugees consistently experience being unable to fit within existing structures, both the execution and possible effectiveness of choice is constrained by the psychological barriers they place upon themselves from being members of the refugee collective. When I ask MF, who has her whole working future ahead of her, if she feels hope about the future here, she laughs nervously. "No, not really. I don't know if it is really possible to get a good job" as a refugee, she says (Field notes, May 5, 2018). The feelings of A3, Mrs. T2 and MF are similar to those in an exchange with Mrs. A2, a younger, married Afghani woman with a subsidiary status who is quick to learn German, but who believes that the essence of who she is prevents her from doing anything more to help herself:

Mrs. A2: I wear a hijab. A head cover. So, I don't know what I can do. I might like to do something with medicine. I think I could be a pharmacist with a hijab. Earlier, I thought, maybe a dental assistant. But, I heard from people that I cannot do that because I wear a hijab.

Me: What do you mean? Are you sure?

Mrs. A2: Yes! Many people told me. Some employees and doctors themselves told me. [...] I don't think I can. [...] I have a lot of worry about my German as I think about working. What if I hear something and then don't quite understand it correctly? What if somebody sees me and says, you wear a hijab, you probably cannot speak very good German or do very good work. Then, do I have a chance? (Field notes, March 22, 2018)

These experiences are shared, regardless of legal status, education or language ability. All of these particular women have different traits in this regard, yet still express similar frustrations in feeling unable to execute their livelihood-related choices as they relate to particular structural barriers. Implementation and sometimes effectiveness of choice are difficult as the aforementioned elements of bureaucracy, rigidity and motivation interact. In one instance that offers a holistic example of these interplays and interactions, a local business manager at a political foundation event describes the difficulty of hiring refugees at her firm:

I speak briefly with a woman who is a manager [*Geschäftsführer*] at a machinery factory (her firm builds parts for ships). She says their firm has had horrible experiences with the refugees it has tried to hire. First, the problems have been with the bureaucracy. "Dealing with the bureaucracy cost us months of time, maybe longer," she says. "It was so difficult to work with the Job Center because the rules and standards of what needed to be done and when were completely unclear. There was a lot of back and forth about what candidates they were going to send." It did not seem to her the firm had much choice over who was sent to them. In many cases, the firm received some potential candidates with completely irrelevant experiences. She says, for example, "One person was a veterinarian in Syria. He had no experience with machinery and no desire to learn how to work with it. But could you blame him? He was frustrated because he wanted to work, but he wanted to be a vet again, not a machinist." She tells me that in response to not getting connected with relevant candidates via the Job Center, they tried to partner with a local TSO group to engage directly with more potentially qualified refugees. But here, the more relevant candidates mostly withdrew from

their application processes for other emotional issues; one candidate, she explains, said he could not work full time because his wife was too sick and psychologically stressed, so he had to stay at home to care for her. Another said he feared the work would be too challenging and he would fall short of expectations, perhaps ultimately losing the job. The firm also tried to engage in more general “migration hiring” type events or campaigns (that is, to generally hire people with a migration background). In these instances, she says those with migration backgrounds did not necessarily have a problem translating their skills. But, those with a refugee background were simply operating on a level different than the others for these various reasons. So, in general, their firm has gravitated towards avoiding refugee applicants and favoring other types of migrant applicants. (Field notes, political foundation event, April 12, 2018)

There is the administrative bureaucracy which makes choices on behalf of the refugees and businesses involved, perpetuating cumbersome, opaque procedures. This further prevents the realization of practical needs; those of the firm, but also those of refugees, whose personal health, emotional and career choices ought to align, but are discounted. The result is hiring practices that are difficult to complete for reasons of logistical practicality. In the manager’s example, the refugees involved in the process have little power to change the trajectory of either the hiring manager or the administrators in control.

Another similar instance returns to MF. Given her age and advantageous legal documents, many local governance actors or program officials might view her as having better prospects to reach her broader goals for a livelihood of her choosing, psychological fulfillment from work and holistic material well-being given that she appears to possess better motivation, health and skills capacity than many older refugees (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018). Nonetheless, her further experiences in being able to choose work opportunities reveal similar comprehensive challenges to those of the business manager, as bureaucratic execution clashes with her desired professional goals and choices:

I ask her what she would you like to do ideally for a training course [*Ausbildung*]. She says, “I would love to work in a kindergarten or a school. I think there is a demand for that, and I would like to work with different kinds of people. But, I don’t know if B2 is good enough. Maybe I need C1. And there are no *Ausbildung* places anyway. It is so difficult to find work.”

I ask her what makes it difficult to find work where she lives. She explains that she lives in a smaller village further outside of Stuttgart where there are few busses and no trains. She says, “In the village itself, there is not much work. There is more in the city, but it’s hard enough to get to. Plus, I don’t really want an *Ausbildung* in Stuttgart. I want to try to find one in Hamburg because my fiancé lives there. I want to move to be with him so we can actually plan our wedding. But, I cannot move there unless I show that I have a job there. The papers say I have to stay in Stuttgart. It is already hard to find work close to where I am. It seems impossible in Hamburg. [...]

I ask her if the Job Center has helped her much in her search. She answers, “No, not really. They do not give me any jobs. I need to write an application myself to a job or program I want. I get nervous about it because I am nervous about my writing. I wonder if I would be good in any job because I might need to write emails, and what if my writing is not good enough for that?” I ask her if she thinks people can learn through working. [...] She agrees, of course they can. “I have seen that with my brother. He began working very quickly after he arrived here, right as he got his papers. He works in construction. It’s hard, physical work, but he learned a lot of German from working. When he went to the integration course, he already knew a lot.” (Field notes, May 5, 2018)

Even MF, who possesses the most permissive legal status and full work authorization, a capability to learn and a desire to find a professional place, has practical difficulty moving towards this end. She is restricted legally by the ability to move to a bigger city to work in a profession that is in demand, but also discouraged by more situationally imposed language standards that are never good enough, in her mind, so few if any employment choices would seem effective in bringing her the holistic fulfillment she seeks. Refugees often become trapped in cycles of stagnation in this regard; as the TSO leader from the Roma advocacy organization describes, generally they require work to move forward—financially and psychologically—but to find work, they must find ways to move forward:

If you look at the workplace as an example, there are many employers who would hire a refugee with a toleration status, but instead, they simply say, "That's too risky for me. Why should I hire you if you're only allowed to stay half a year? That's why I will not hire you." Then, in turn, without a work place, the refugee can never extend beyond the toleration status because then it is said, "You receive a right to residence only if you have proven your integration through a job." Therein is the difficulty. (Interview with leader and political advocate, Roma charity organization, January 12, 2018)

Ultimately, it is a common struggle that many refugees face in the study context. They would like to move forward towards more meaningful material opportunities, but the clash of goals with the organization of the opportunity system prevents them from executing choice to move beyond more menial statuses.

6.3.2 Success through institutional intermediaries

Constrained choice means that refugees in the study context often find themselves feeling less empowered to independently move forward towards more stable, meaningful material states. But as the complexities of local policy execution constrain choice at this level, their experiences also show how they often require connections to intermediaries to help them advance within the economic domain. These specific institutional intermediaries are in positions to act on their behalf, primarily in official positions of assistance, such as case workers or shelter volunteers. These intermediaries are better situated to find or exploit inroads to material, education or employment opportunities that may be circumstantial, conditional or discretionary. As discussed in Chapter 5, this is supported by qualities of the institutional provisioning situation that volunteer groups and Germans working in their local neighborhood communities have been responsible for many economic and material support efforts:

[TSOs] play a very important role because in recent years, they have been very much involved in the guidance and support of the refugees, which the authorities and even the official charities could not do. Everyone was not prepared and not equipped to welcome and accompany so many people. That's why the volunteers are very important. (Interview with leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts, January 23, 2018)

In acknowledging and heavily relying on the support role of volunteer groups, the government provisioning system has also formally positioned them as the way to bridge resource gaps on the ground, since the system itself has been overtaxed and distributed so hierarchically. In this way, social connections to intermediaries in these positions, willing to expend effort towards an individual case, are objectively helpful in meeting needs that are expanding in complexity because they have filled resource voids by system design. Because of this, when there is "a family, who cannot advance towards the next steps of getting out of the shelter or searching for a job alone," intermediaries are critical because they are positioned to "consider the specific areas of need together with the family" and address them concretely with specific searches and solutions (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018). Local government actors feel these channels can be especially beneficial within employment and job-related endeavors:

We can propose offerings, together as colleagues (myself included) to go to volunteer events. When volunteers cannot make it to these events, it has often left us trying to explain to them, over and over again, why this [outcome] or why that. So this engagement is the only thing that can be done to create transparency about why and how such administrative actions take place. We cannot change the provisions because, as I've said, those have a federal legal basis. (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017)

At the same time, the potential for more individualized material support through local volunteers has led to refugees understanding and perceiving them as critical or essential channels for material help especially. Of course, the level of effort to help in such an involved capacity is high, leading to a limited supply of volunteers willing to offer it (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018; interview

with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018). This makes refugees in general view connections to these advocates even more valuably, especially since such partnerships often enhance the ability to reach otherwise difficult-to-obtain goals involving evolving and existential material stability, as a social worker describes having worked with volunteers and refugees desiring connections to them:

What I have found to be great is the god parent families. But I am always looking for them. I find no one. There is no one. For people, it is too much. It is too much effort to take care of a [refugee] family like that, and it is also exhausting, I know. It really is. Because it involves so much, help in finding housing and so on, with things of that nature. But then, at the same time, the refugee families want this very much. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018)

Participating refugees also feel the scarcity and necessity of these connections especially when they lack them, but see the advantages they offer others. Mrs. M1 frequently asserts her frustration that she has not been able to make such a connection with a volunteer at the networking cafe she often visits. Other women in her shelter have already made these deeper connections. Mrs. M1 notices this has resulted in resource gains and benefits for the others that she does not see herself having access to, therefore she sees her choices as less powerful or meaningful in being applicable to reach the goals she wants:

[Mrs. M1] has told me this story a few times in the past, that one of her trying to buy a sewing machine at the flea market to be able to mend clothes more quickly so she does not have to do by hand. She bought one, and it was completely non-functional. [...] She claims [another woman at the shelter] has four sewing machines she received from volunteers, and [the woman] or any of the volunteers won't give any to her. [...] She can't afford to buy one new, and she isn't about to try again to get one at a flea market. She doesn't think she can get help from the [shelter] office.

She says, "Sometimes I think, is the women's cafe really useful? I asked [a friend of mine in the shelter], do *you* think it's useful? We both think it helps us to practice German. But for other help? Nobody there helps us. That woman [specific volunteer] just helps Mrs. A2 and Mrs. F2, but nobody there has done anything for us. My daughter even asked me, should I ask [specific volunteer] whether she could help with the items we need? I said, no, don't bother. She won't do anything. [...] I have no desire to ask at the cafe. (Field notes, April 29, 2018)

6.3.2.1 Breaking through in language, employment and financial independence

On the other hand, the assistance that intermediaries offer is often the actionable turning point for refugees in the study context to make progress towards their economic and material goals to grow necessary language skills and access employment opportunities if they can encounter them. Family SM's experiences are examples of the range of economic and material progress that well-positioned intermediaries can drive on a family's behalf:

The son tells me about how he sees the cafe as a chance to connect with others. "Everything comes from the cafe," he says. "I have met a lot of people there. I have met one woman who helps me a lot with German. [...]"

He continues, "Every Friday, I go near the church to get tutoring in math because I need a little help in math. I didn't learn much in school, so a man I met through the cafe teaches me extra. He even is part of a small sport group that meets together every Sunday to train. [...] So, he helped me to find this group." (Field notes, March 6, 2018)

Gaining language skills is perhaps the most fundamental way that refugees benefit from intermediaries, both specifically among participants but also generally among refugees more broadly. With some government data noting that only around half of refugees can pass the B1 language exam after the integration course (BAMF, 2018c), it is clear that mastering German demands more than classroom attendance. "The most significant language course is in fact the permanent exchange with Germans," explains a leader from the Foreigners' Authority (Interview with leader, municipal Foreigners' Authority, January 12, 2018), and a social worker also confirms:

It is rather the social element that is missing. I quite often hear that they [refugees] lack the willingness to learn German, but where? We have courses, but then no more people who speak German with them. So this connection here is lacking. They have no German friends, they have no connections here, not even in the neighborhood. This does not exist, and that's the sad part. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018)

But the search for language intermediaries is often a cyclical pursuit, as the participating refugees highlight; just as language is needed to build sought-after social connections, social connections are simultaneously needed to build language. Without the language ability to connect with Germans to improve a desired and necessary skill, refugees express feelings of stagnation that no learning can occur, for example:

Mrs. UB [a Kurdish Syrian married woman with one child and a 1-year subsidiary protection] also says, "My teacher at school tells me, 'Speak German. You're in Germany now. Don't you want to learn?' I say, yes, I want to. But how? I do not have so much contact." (Field notes, March 14, 2018)

Instead, when intermediaries can engage refugees such as Mr. SM and his family in language learning, they offer a way to move forward accessing opportunities for learning and skill growth:

Mr. SM's son says, "We come [to the networking café] for a lot of reasons. We find it helpful in many ways. The people are nice. They answer our questions. Before I started coming here, my German was much worse. I improved because I could have contact with people. I met [a volunteer], who helped me with German tutoring and helped me arrange a math tutor."

[...] Another volunteer says, "This is a reason why it is good to visit people, keep engaging, keep speaking with them. Learning just isn't in school." (Field notes, May 2, 2018)

The nature of finding inroads to employment emerges similarly in the study context, often requiring an intermediary connection point to work through procedures to advance a placement. Refugees in the study context often struggle themselves to execute employment or education choices in terms of bringing them to fruition. VM, for example, explains how he was able to engage with a city case worker himself who specialized in refugee career counseling, but he still required her dedicated interventions to move forward with actually being placed in an internship position that eventually led to a formal training position:

"There is a person who is employed by the city [*Rathaus*] who often visits the shelter here and helps refugees with many things. This person helps to arrange opportunities for school and training, especially language training at the vocational school [*Volkshochschule*]. But this person also collects CVs of refugees and distributes them to local businesses who might have an interest in hiring people for training or work permits." He explains how he initially met with this woman about his CV, but did not hear anything from her for a while. He says, "[...] Eventually, I found her again on the internet, and I got in touch with her. She said she remembered me, and we should meet again. So, I met with her again, and she took me to meet my current boss. She talked to him for me, and she helped discuss my situation with him. So, my boss offered me an internship for a few months to see if he might wish to offer a training position [*Ausbildung*] later." (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

This is in contrast to Mr. M1, on the other hand, who has previous skills from working in the oil industry in Syria, but no connection to somebody who might advance his case or make the connection between his skills and potential training programs:

[The volunteer] asks me if I know if Mr. M1 has looked into any special employment programs at a [nearby oil industry company]. She says, "I ask because they, as a company, I think, have been more open to hiring older people. There are some special programs they have, where they have been good at training such people. But he might need to find somebody to help him write the application or meet the right people in the company. I think if he had those connections, it might be possible." (Interview with shelter volunteer, Red Cross, March 13, 2018)

Intermediaries not only assist in finding such opportunities that may be otherwise inaccessible, but in navigating complex bureaucratic requirements to realize them. Mr. SM's son explains the necessity of such intermediaries, who were an involved volunteer and a sympathetic school representative in his case, in helping him attend a school program he felt unable to access by himself:

The son says, "I found it myself. I always wanted to go to school. I was in a terrible German course. I wanted a better school. I asked the Job Center if I could have a better school or go to a real school. They said, no, I was too old."

The volunteer with us says, "Yes. I think sometimes they say, only if you are 18 or younger can you go to [a high school] equivalency school."

The son says, "Yes, I am older than that. I knew another guy in my German class. He had told me a little bit about his school, where he was learning other topics. I asked him about it. I said, can I go too? He said, I will take you to my teacher at this trade school [*Berufsschule*]. There, I talked with the teacher. I asked, can I come? She said, you can probably come. We will need to talk to the Job Center before you can come." [...] He goes on to explain that he worked with this teacher and another volunteer from [the networking cafe] to submit a request to the Job Center to be able to officially attend the trade school. He could not start at the school until he received confirmation from the Job Center. Apparently, it took about 4 months for an approval to come, and there was some ongoing back and forth during this time period as to whether or not it would ultimately be allowed. At the end of the explanation, the son says, "Then, the Job Center said, you can go. So, now I am there."

The volunteer with us remarks, "You see, he had this help from this teacher and this volunteer. For somebody without that? No chance at all, do you see? Even for us Germans, the bureaucratic German [language] and processes are difficult to understand, much less for them?" (Field notes, April 27, 2018)

Without his advocates who were more informed on bureaucratic processes and were in positions to challenge them, Mr. SM's son would have likely ended up as he originally thought, taking the Job Center's word that he could not attend a different educational program. In the study context, interventions often occur at this level of advocacy because specific case workers or volunteers "may know individual people or families better and their cases more closely," so can find the inroads to exceptional solutions that are otherwise seemingly unadvertised (Field notes, presentation with Job Center and division leader, municipal Housing Office, March 1, 2018). This is confirmed through the presence of various types of educational sessions and meetings hosted by the city Job Center or similar agencies. The events focus on engaging directly with volunteers, case workers or other intermediaries, who are further empowered with information that is "trying to explain how so and why [...] such administrative actions take place" (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017). Attending these events frequently to observe the dynamics of intermediary advocacy, I confirm the absence of refugees as I observe volunteers instead lobbying on their behalf, hoping to find exceptions to processes:

Two individuals seem to have very specific questions about [...] families they work with. They want to know who is responsible for what costs. What must families pay? What will the Job Center pay? How long does a review take? The Job Center employee says she can answer these specific questions after the talk and try to clarify the problems. Volunteers are coming with extremely specific questions and concerns and trying to advocate with individual employees about individual cases. My impression is that this seems like a high degree of disempowerment for the refugees themselves (none of whom are at this meeting, of course); it seems that whether a question or claim gets reviewed has to do with a) if a person has a connection with a volunteer dedicated enough to come to such a meeting and b) whether or not a random Job Center employee will privately discuss such a concern with the volunteer. (Field notes, presentation with Job Center and division leader, municipal Housing Office, March 1, 2018)

Dialogs about the materialistic or economic advancement of individuals or families occur without them. Advancement is often contingent upon this because the government systems can only "have the big picture in mind," whereas volunteers can "have the individual in mind" and bridge the gap between the two sides (Interview with leader, municipal Housing Office, November 28, 2017). Wanting to integrate and move

on means “tak[ing] a lot of help from different volunteers” to have a way to “engage more with the community resources available” and thus find ways of moving forward (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, October 4, 2017). But the advocacy of intermediaries also represents another layer of complexity in the factors that can constrain refugees’ empowerment to decide themselves how they wish to do so. Aside from the fact that there is never a guarantee that a connection will result in anything (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, October 4, 2017), refugees can become objects within the volunteer system, as those well-meaning may use their advocacy positions to make choices on behalf of those they are trying to help.

Ultimately, as seen through refugee and expert perspectives, there is a consistent desire for the “real participation in normal life” (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017). But those who feel like they can move in that direction see “people who take care of [them], who are on [their] side” (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017). Otherwise, they see a complicated system difficult to surpass and isolating them from choices in how to move forward. Many are left with feelings of resignation about how they can control or contribute to their futures, as A3 highlights, despite her fully recognized status and high level of education:

When I ask her to tell me more about what she lacks in Germany, she pauses and says, “I need to think about this one. The only thing that I like about life here is that I am safe. That’s just it. I am only safe here. Everything else isn’t life for me. Life is just difficult. I can’t work. There is no hope for work. I can’t study. [...]

I ask, “What might help make it better? if you could choose outcomes that would make you feel better about your life here, what would they be?”

She says, “I would want special work for me. What I mean is, I don’t want this welfare. I don’t want to have to go to the Job Center for money. I don’t want to take from the government. I would want Germany to say, here is work that you can do, that is special to you. [...] I had my own dream. I really thought I would come, I would bring my translated certificates and I would get an equivalency. I would work. Life would happen. I would get a Mercedes! But, everything is different. You need to wake up from your dreams because it’s not like that. I just thought Europe would be more open, more free, not this difficult life. I lot of people have not studied or learn where they come from, and they think here, they can do everything, all is possible, but I am telling you, they need to wake up. [...] My brother says, don’t think on any of these dreams. Don’t even bother. So, now, I do not know exactly what I am thinking about the future.” (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018)

Without their connections to volunteers or other engaged Germans, refugees in the study context understand their progress towards moving forward could be slowed or stagnate. They recognize that connections may give them access to opportunities they would not have had otherwise and are a critical link towards moving closer to applying their choices more fruitfully to reach stability, security and independence.

Summary

As this chapter has explored, journeying beyond subsistence is a central theme within the material and economic goals of refugees in the study context. Just as Family M1’s story at the chapter’s beginning illustrates, expansion of economic life goes beyond the pursuit of mere physical goods or money, blending with elements of obtaining both psychological and legal stability that help to create new, positive identities in a new place. For Mr. and Mrs. M1, the ability to move forward in economic life is a gateway towards enhanced feelings of rootedness, not only in terms of having more secure finances, but also stronger perceptions that they are contributing meaningfully to their family’s own well-being, as well as to their wider community as new residents in Germany. But Mr. and Mrs. M1 struggle to reconcile these desires for enhanced means of provisioning to feel productive and motivate their children with structural factors limiting them from doing so. Their frustrations often stem from their difficulties applying their own skills and current motivations in a rigid environment of regulation that limits the practical execution of their choices and preferences, instead relegating them to long times waiting with a sense of dependent stagnation.

Like Mr. and Mrs. M1, as the setting for daily living moves beyond states of emergency and survival, so too do other refugees pursue the more existential goal of participating more holistically in society in the form of livelihood activities and self-determined provisioning. The refugees in the study context possess agency in the form of a wide variety of technical skills, professional backgrounds and language abilities they wish to apply in their new communities. As such, they also seek additional material and human capital assets, along with the social and psychological assets, that might better position them to reach these desired end states of greater physical and emotional independence, and, more broadly, general well-being and social inclusion. The most valued forms of agency, for example, are not merely money or jobs for their own sakes. They are also language skills to more easily interact with others and find means to provide. They are human capital skills to find work that provides personal satisfaction and a means to enhance identity.

As a review of documentary and interview sources shows, governmental institutional structures in which these economic and provisioning activities take place are, on the one hand, rooted in underlying principles of humanitarianism. They are open and inclusive in that they attempt by their allowances to safeguard minimum levels of subsistence. As provisioning structures, they are becoming more permissive in formally opening channels to participate in activities that at least offer theoretical possibilities for financial independence and security. At the same time, the structures also face high levels of operational uncertainty and complexity in their administration, frequently decreasing effectiveness in terms of operational quality.

Ultimately, these components reveal how refugees in the study context have difficulty aligning their assets and capabilities within the legal opportunity structure to move beyond means of subsistence towards more established states of stable, secure and independent self-provisioning. This reconciliation is challenging, first because the valuable components of economic agency are in and of themselves more existential, but also because the characteristics of the structures make the application and growth of agency difficult to pursue independently. Instead, they often require institutional intermediaries such as volunteers or case workers to circumvent operational barriers and find entry points for relevant participation. The result is empowerment at a level of actors above refugees, whose success in reaching their goals is often dependent on the right intermediaries. Those without such relationships often feel like they are stagnating, with lessened hope that they might be able to find ways to choose to move forward in the improvement of both their material conditions of living, but also mental satisfaction with being able to participate in society through common activities of exchange, learning and production. Despite the various drivers of refugees' original migration decisions, economic empowerment seems different than expected. A young, male Syrian recognized refugee who works for a TSO conveys this from his own experience in flight:

And I have always heard that many people thought that Germany is paradise. They thought they were coming to such a place, that the doors would be immediately open for them, everything would be instantly easy and everything would be instantly made for them. Immediate status, immediate money, so on and so forth, high expectations. And that's why many people came here. [...] But because so many people came, everything has been overwhelmed. And then people were disappointed. (Interview with EC, Syrian refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018)

As he discusses generally, refugees have not necessarily been met with complete destitution, but rather, have been forced to contend with their misconceptions about the nature of the new material or livelihood reality they face in Germany. In the economic domain, this is the essence of impaired empowerment. For those in the study context, the struggle is not necessarily fighting for emergency or survival resources. Rather, it is facing the lack of holistic opportunity or potential to move forward in choosing how to pursue more existential socioeconomic inclusion without executional barriers in the way.

7. Searching for Home in the Sociocultural Domain

Building family life, culture and networks: Family SM, an older Syrian married couple with adult children and fully recognized refugee status

I meet Mr. and Mrs. SM over coffee and cake in a networking café held at a church near their shelter (Shelter 3). Kurdish Syrians in their mid-50s, who have recently received a fully recognized refugee status, they have a large, extensive family. The family has four adult children, along with 10 grandchildren, who live in various areas of NRW. These children have been more established in Germany for some time, but despite this, Mr. and Mrs. SM, along with three remaining children, migrate through asylum channels in late 2015. These children include a 12-year-old son, along with another adult son in his young-20s, who are assigned to live together in a single-room repurposed shipping container. The adult son also has a twin sister, who migrates slightly later, and so is assigned separately to live in a shelter outside Essen, a city about an hour north of Cologne. Because she is not currently married, although preparing to do so, both she and her parents would prefer to live together, or at least closer to one another. Her twin brother explains:

His sister made repeated appeals to the Job Center, but has not been able to get a transfer to Cologne. She has been told she is too old. She could get a transfer if she were under 18, but otherwise has been told there are not grounds for her to live with her parents. Additionally, she has been told that because she is administratively assigned to live in the city outside of Essen, and her parents live in a shelter in Cologne, she cannot be transferred. The son tells me, "They always say if we had an apartment, then she could live with us." (Field notes, March 16, 2018)

As an interim solution, she often remains with them for long periods of time, despite a lack of formal permission to do so; she slips into the container space without signing in and tries to remain indoors to go unnoticed by security. This comes at the cost of avoiding her integration course in Essen, but she and her family feel like she can more comfortably attend her course once she is married and settled properly with her future husband. As for the rest of the family, some relatives remain in Syria, but others approach living in Germany for nearly 30 years. These distant, prior-settled cousins keep them informed about the developing migration situation, especially given worsening conditions in both Syria and Turkey, where the family lives temporarily after escaping Syria. "Our cousins told us that Germany was treating refugees better than other places in Europe. We felt like if our cousins could make it in Germany for so long, we might be able to also," explains Mr. SM's adult son (Field notes, March 16, 2018). Before they come to Germany and the family reflects on the structural conditions that are understandable to them, they consider seeking asylum in the USA, but feel it is not possible, not only due to the logistics of travel, but also because they "don't think the USA is really making it possible for refugees to come in the first place" (Field notes, March 16, 2018).

Although they are Kurdish Syrians, the family still waits over a year for their initial decisions. While Mr. and Mrs. SM receive a fully recognized status, along with their 12-year-old son, their older son receives only a 1-year subsidiary status, which must later be renewed and is successfully exchanged for a fully recognized status. Despite these favorable legal outcomes, they have lived just over a year in their one-room shipping container. From the cramped space, in which they share a kitchen container with another eight families in their block, Family SM attempts to maintain a cadence of what is culturally familiar to them. When I visit their container for the first time, I see that they have disassembled the issued bunk beds and arranged the mattresses on the floor with pillows in the way they preferred to sleep and lounge in Syria. They have apportioned off an area with a curtain and some makeshift shelves to house a wall full of cooking supplies and foodstuffs procured from various Turkish markets; large jars of pickles and olives, bags of grains, vegetables, cans of sauces, dried beans, nuts, spices and oils. As Mr. SM previously owns a restaurant in Syria, along with two concrete plants, he is an adept cook and enjoys preparing foods with his wife for

large meals they often offer for volunteers and their family members visiting from other German cities. He tells me about how he enjoys cooking more since he has been able to slowly collect some small gadgets, such as a scoop that easily forms falafel patties and a hand grinder to process soaked chickpeas. At the same time, working in the shared kitchen remains difficult, given its inconsistent cleaning and often malfunctioning appliances, as well as the needs of multiple families trying to use the space.

They also try to fill their social calendar in as much as they can. They encourage their other children to visit when they are able. Despite the space, visiting has at least become easier since they moved into the shipping container, as they previously live in at least four other provisional shelters across NRW where visiting is more restricted. Phone data is a prioritized expense to keep in contact. They steadily attend the networking café, to interact with the shelter social workers who sometimes visit and get to know one another in friendlier terms, but also mainly to meet different volunteers who assist them in various ways. Through the networking café, the family meets school tutors for their sons, German tutors for themselves and generally sympathetic local residents who often help them sort mail, read documents, participate in leisure activities like sport clubs, search for apartment listings online and sometimes attend appointments.

The family misses their life in Syria. When Mr. and Mrs. SM talk about moving forward in Germany, their desires are often grounded in wishing they could better choose the intersecting components of their home life. In the ways they are able, they choose to put forth efforts to these ends by relying on different networks in different ways. For their desires to replicate cultural richness and emotional peace, they turn to their family networks for participation in rituals of visiting, cooking and hosting, although legalities and practical restrictions prevent their relocation or rebuilding of these elements of life more freely. For their desires to try to navigate these issues, they turn to their intermediary networks, with whom they understand connections are vital to help endure still-difficult areas of living that could assist with home building—learning German to be eligible for work, attending the right educational programs, sorting through apartment listings and making applications. They see less value in associating with other refugees to meet these ends. They find them difficult to trust and conflicting in personal values, despite often coming from the same area of the world. They do not identify with a practicing faith tradition and so often feel their own family values clash with those of other Syrian Muslim refugees around them, especially as they view Muslim fundamentalism in their village as a cause for the violence and persecution there in the first place.

But better positioned than many with their agency repository of a favorable legal status, sociable personas and even a team of supportive volunteers, the family still struggles in the structural sense. Their daughter is legally prevented from living near or with them, despite understandable cultural and familial reasons for wanting to do so. Their family members receive different legal statuses and degrees of certainty in their stay. They struggle to find an apartment to afford with their welfare money, like the others in the city's tight housing market. Their adult son wonders if he might bear the largest burden as the best chance towards anchoring the rebuilding of this family life, as his prospects for long-term, meaningful work he might choose himself seem the highest, given his age and attendance at a vocational college. His parents, older and struggling through their integration language courses, wonder why they cannot simply choose to start a business, as in their lives before, or even menial work that might make them feel more productive in starting to rebuild what was lost. For Family SM, what is lost is not only material—houses, cars and businesses that might be regained with easier choices for work—but also psychological—a sense of familial peace that might be rebuilt if they could better choose how to structure these general intersecting areas of daily life. During one dinner visit, we move as seamlessly from grinding chickpeas and drinking coffee as we do from scrolling through phone pictures and videos of injured relatives and dead bodies in the streets of their village. Violence is as banal as falafel. As conflict continues to drag on in their village, the family may struggle to be completely free from this specific mental burden. But it might be rectified more were their choices for a more self-determined and self-providing family life enhanced as a coping mechanism. “Families should be together” to live their lives, Mr. SM explains. “It’s better that way” (Field notes, April 24, 2018).

Introduction

Empowerment in the sociocultural domain means being able to engage in customary domestic or relational practices as individuals, families or other networked communities of people. The extent to which refugees are empowered to this end helps them maintain relevant cultural, habitual and daily life rituals, build fruitful family lives and form a sense of belonging in their new areas of living. For this reason, the conceptual approach of Chapter 2 underscores the importance of sociocultural and community life as a domain of empowerment. This chapter discusses how agency in the form of living conditions and experiential diversity interacts with governmental institutional frameworks to constrain or enable empowerment participating in domestic, familial and community engagement.

Refugees in the study context frequently wonder where they fit within the groupings of these experiences. Instability disrupts the building of domestic life, and they lack commonalities with which to more fully identify with those around them, particularly in shelter environments. As the city integration programs leader describes, refugees share refugeehood, but are often different from one another in the legal determinations and benefits they receive and the characteristics that might form more cohesive bonds amongst them, especially within confined shelter spaces:

That's how it is in the refugee shelters. The only common feature is the escape. [...]. Escape from Syria, maybe escape from Macedonia, or economic refugees, escape from Africa, so, they all come to the shelter. [...] In the shelters, so many diverse groups exist, that is to say, ethnicities and also [social] milieus. And so, it's now presumptuous to think that the refugees find each other together and develop common governing strategies. (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017)

But they are also different from Germans in that they are the newcomers learning how to live in a new place. "I am away from everyone," explains X1, a young single mother from Ghana, who eventually receives a residency permit through her child born to a European father after her asylum claim denial (Field notes, April 26, 2018). She does not feel she can identify with other shelter residents because "they are close to their own people." On the other hand, as a black woman, she wonders if her race might mean that Germans would not accept her wholly as a person (Field notes, April 26, 2018). As she reflects on what her eventual community might be, she knows at least she longs for her own stable home, from which she might build that community and share with others as she would have in Ghana. "One day," she explains, "I really want to have [house decorations] in my own place, to make it like a real place. [...] When I get my house one day, I will be so happy" (Field notes, April 26, 2018). For refugees in the study context, being able to leave the instability of shelter life means they can control their living spaces, choose how to organize them and not settle for "what gets imposed by others" (Interview with social worker, Diakonie, February 26, 2018).

Ultimately, the journey to becoming more rooted in daily practices of home life within a stable community of living embodies empowerment in the sociocultural domain, the focus of this chapter. The first section discusses particularly how the conditions of shelter living in Cologne shape physical and interpersonal components of residents' agency. Although they benefit from the material physical shelter they receive, the qualities of spaces do not always lend themselves to easy living. They are temporary spaces that affect life physiologically and psychologically, often dirty, crowded, cramped, loud, and contentious, frequently involving shared facilities like kitchens and toilets. Interpersonally, the shelter composition of refugees from various backgrounds, on the one hand, prevents segregation and increases exposure to different types of people. But on the other hand, the diversity in language, culture, religion, legal status, educational background and ethnicity mean that residents often have few commonalities with which to identify with one another. Lacking language to interact and information to better understand each other's predicaments, fear of others, knowledge shortfalls and misunderstandings are common. Together, these physical and interpersonal qualities of shelter living affect material, physiological, psychological, social and informational assets in attempting to establish domestic life and find a sense of community in a new place.

The second section discusses the nature of the governmental opportunity structures delineating the administrative bounds of shelter living. Although municipalities are legally obliged to shelter refugees to avoid homelessness and destitution, complex structures of shelter management spread across national, state, municipal and TSO bounds create layers of regulation that limit effectiveness and adaptability in local implementation. This has been especially acute, given the context of emergency resource management needing to provide shelter for many refugees in a short time period, within Cologne's already constrained urban housing environment. These opportunity structure qualities have resulted in issues of quality control, instability and over-regulation that tend to close off entry points for bottom-up interaction and change.

The final section discusses the interaction of these components to describe the degree of empowerment participants feel are present in reaching desired ends for home and community life. Given the characteristics of shelter governance structures, along with the physical and interpersonal conditions of agency within shelters, refugees in the study context do not choose to see shelters as permanent homes or areas to make places. As such, they often feel little incentive to circumvent barriers to attempt to develop means to extensively evolve them to that end. Especially when administrative structures can explicitly prevent localized choice in terms of determining how shelter spaces can be used and protracted stays highlight ongoing differences among residents, it is difficult for residents to find ways to meaningfully interact with one another to form groups in which they might address problems of living through their own collectively chosen solutions. A real home, and a recognized place within the broader community outside the shelter, are instead the goals or ideal choices frequently described, but difficult to achieve individually. As in political and economic domains, power for enhancing choice rests more with intermediary actors who possess more positional flexibility to change conditions of shelter life, move refugees into private homes and foster connections to Germans that inspire more feelings of connectedness. At the same time, as the participating refugees seek a sense of some personal normalcy amid instability, they use what resources are available to find ways to prioritize family values and the cultural elements of home life in both rudimentary and creative ways, underscoring that even the most basic ways of existing can reveal power to make choices about the organization of daily life through rituals of normalcy.

7.1 Agency and diversity in community spaces

Shelter may be the structure that allows for survival, but homes—and the communities they exist within—are the spaces for place-making, that is, for the gathering of animate and inanimate things, of personal and collective experiences, histories, interactions and thoughts (Pink, 2008, p. 178). Moving on towards building new homes and communities ultimately “begins in people’s living rooms” (Field notes, political party foundation event, April 12, 2018) because the domestic unit is the most localized arena for the possibility of decision making in the progression of daily life. As such, especially given that shelter housing has been and continues to be the predominant means of refugee accommodation in Cologne, the physical and interpersonal elements of shelter living are foundational to the components of agency that contribute to the possibility of empowered social, communal and cultural experiences.

7.1.1 Enduring the conditions of shelter life

A private home is a key component of agency, if not one of the greatest needs of refugees more generally, because it deepens possibilities for personal, family and community life (Interview with refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, February 26, 2018). As a leader from the municipal housing office describes, based on managing the logistical aspects of longer-term shelter living, without a private home, refugees can be removed from controlling the most basic elements of their own living:

The biggest impact [on refugees' daily lives] is being in accommodations where they cannot take care of themselves, where they cannot cook for themselves. Because, in this case, they are automatically alienated. To be able to prepare food, to go shopping, to decide what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat; all this structures the day, the daily routine. It makes me responsible for my life. That's a very, very important aspect. (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

But shelter living is unfortunately the dominant housing experience of refugees in Cologne, consistent from the early arrival years beginning in 2015. In the study context, of the 28 participating refugees I consistently interacted with, only seven eventually lived in private apartments by the end of the fieldwork period, despite having been in Germany for many months, if not years. Six families underwent at least one known shelter transfer during the same fieldwork period. Only three, who were all single, lived in their own private apartments when I met them through connections to shelter residents, but shelters still remained the housing type in which they had lived the longest. All participants had lived in a minimum of two separate shelters since arriving in Germany; others reported being transferred three or even more times. One Roma family from Montenegro with seven children had been living for over seven years in the same four disconnected rooms at the end of a hallway in a building of Shelter 1, a repurposed adult activity center. Unable to rent their own apartment due in part to their family size and in part due to the precarity of their toleration status (renewed in 6-month increments for the entirety of their 20-year stay in Germany), they were ultimately transferred to yet another shelter on immediate notice when the city condemned the building in the winter of 2017.

Of course, refugees in general benefit from the rote reception of shelter. As described both by individual participants and experts, there is agency in the form of receiving the material asset of a roof overhead to avoid homelessness. The coverage of basic shelter as a fundamental need can be said to be quite good because its provisioning been highly prioritized (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018). As such, a sentiment of gratefulness is frequently present in some form among participating refugees, especially when they reflect on the earliest stages of their escape journeys and the destitution they have fled. Mr. SM and his family share this with me often, for example. They understand acutely how close they feel to having absolutely nothing, and so they feel gratitude even for the single-room shipping container their five-person family unit shares:

Throughout the evening, we talk about the mixed feelings the family has about their life in Germany. On the one hand, they tell me they are grateful that Germany has offered them a place to go [because] there is nothing to go back too. "It's all gone [*alles weg, alles kaput*]," [Mr. SM] says, "The businesses, the houses; it's all destroyed." [...] [Mr. SM and his adult son] explain together (the son translates), "We think people in Germany have a good heart. We think they are trying to help a lot of people." (Field notes, March 16, 2018)

In a similar way as time passes, asylum claims advance, petitions for transfers are granted and municipal housing policy changes to eliminate rudimentary forms of shelter (i.e., mass emergency housing in the form of cots lined up in large gyms and sport halls). In the local context, some of the most basic, frustrating and harmful elements of shelter life change as processes and time change, and refugees in the city benefit from the objective increases in comfort provided when cots and open spaces at least become closed-off rooms with walls, as shared by a social worker referring to how shelter residents she works with consider their current, closed-off, purpose-built shelter in comparison to previous more rudimentary ones:

I would say that people are actually quite satisfied here [at this purpose-built shelter]. Many people came from the [gymnasium] or other such emergency shelters, so they are happy here to have a space much more like an apartment. The space itself is closed, private. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018)

Even so, “All shelters are bad in some way,” the 14-year-old daughter of Mrs. M1 from Syria explains to me (Field notes, March 7, 2018). Although the worst forms of shelter are often eventually left behind, steady-state conditions of shelter living still affect residents’ individual assets and capabilities, be they psychological, physiological, material, informational or social in nature. Participants and experts describe how shelter life is often physically unpleasant, mentally taxing and generally disruptive to basic routines of personal living, regardless of improvements in some so-called creature comforts. A primary motivation for searching for private housing is moving beyond these general difficult living conditions because shelter life lacks (albeit to varying degrees) space, cleanliness, privacy and security.

In the study context, these physical conditions of shelter life affect different components of agency. In one way, the material components of living are affected, the household and meaningful things that are simply difficult to gather when space is at a premium. In the most rudimentary forms of emergency accommodation, hundreds of people are placed into large halls or gyms, with little space for personal possessions, as I observe especially during a field visit to an emergency shelter where I originally thought my fieldwork would be situated:

The living area is a large gym. It has what appears to be a fairly large cooking facility that is open on the left-hand side when you walk in. It seems this was probably a school cafeteria at one point, so the equipment is industrial. There are no tables; just this open kitchen area [...] Most of the [gym] space is filled up with cots. There are no walls. [The social worker] says it’s often hard for families and children that the space has no walls. The cots are lined up in rows. There are probably at least a couple hundred of them, as the gym is essentially full of them. They are covered in very old blankets and pillows. Some cots have playpens next to them serving as baby cribs. [...] People’s things, like suitcases, shoes and water bottles, are next to and under the cots. [... The social worker] feels people are here too long. (Field notes, March 3, 2017)

But even in purpose-built shelters, as I see during fieldwork, room space is not expansive. Many larger families live in one- or two-room spaces, when more area would obviously be ideal. In the fieldwork shelters, as well as in Cologne more generally, many residents in shelters still share rooms, if not kitchens, bathrooms and wash facilities. If they are even available, outdoor leisure spaces (such as benches, grills or playgrounds) are almost entirely communal, as opposed to private, and indoor ones are usually locked and must be reserved through the discretion of shelter management. Although some with more precarious statuses, such as asylum seekers or those with toleration, may be more predisposed to remain longer in the most provisional forms of shelter, the uncertainty of transfer still plagues all shelter residents, who can theoretically be compelled by the city to move at any time. All residents, regardless of legal status or background, are subject to these same physical conditions; one group of people does not, somehow, receive better conditions simply as a matter of course. In emergency shelters, cots are strewn about large open spaces (such as tents or gyms) for all who live there. If shelters possess shared facilities such as kitchens or bathrooms, all residents are subject to their conditions of use. Some shelters, as I find out through my fieldwork observations and interviews, may attempt to prioritize private spaces for those with families or proven employment, if space is available. Single travelers, with or without children, may be more likely to share rooms in the absence of space. But as a consolidated observation, the difficult living conditions of shelters are common to those who live there, regardless of their own legal or demographic characteristics.

Space is also not merely about the current place, but also what might come to pass in the next one. When residents might stay in a shelter for months, or years, but be forced to move with weeks’ or even days’ warning, they often describe how it can be difficult to gather domestic materials of daily living. As I learn through interviews with social workers, municipal personnel and shelter residents themselves, when they are forced to move, refugees can bring household items with them, to include dishes, rugs and furniture, so long as they can carry them themselves and they are (even) permitted to where they are going. The city does not offer resources to move, despite their orders to do so; residents are in charge of moving

their own belongings, often on the bus or train, or with a taxi if they can afford it. There is worry about accumulating items which may not be able to come along, as C3 and P1, single mothers from Ghana and Nigeria respectively, explain to me. Still asylum seekers during this conversation, they face acute instability in terms of moving and possession gathering:

C3 tells me that she wishes she could have a microwave, but she doesn't want to buy it because then she will have to carry it when she moves. She would also really love to get a couch for the wall area, but will not for the same reasons; she could not move it. P1 begins to talk about how this same issue is problematic for her roommate. She says her roommate has already bought much of her own equipment from real shops, things like a vacuum, a really large baby bed, a TV, a microwave. P1 explains, "It is because she is preparing for her own apartment and she needs all these things to start an apartment with." But, P1 does not think her roommate will actually be able to get an apartment. She wonders how she will carry all the things herself when she moves. C3 agrees it is problematic to have too many things. She would really like a TV and would have bought one already, but she would have to carry it herself and so she didn't want to worry about that. (Field notes, September 27, 2017)

But as time goes on, as even P1 explains about her roommate, refugees make do with the spaces they have and attempt to slowly accumulate what they need. But doing so is no guarantee of either residential stability or moving to a similar place if a transfer comes. When transfers come, there is no assurance that residents will have the same amount of space in a new shelter, and often, they end up with less. For example, after finding out the shelter building is being condemned, I discuss her upcoming transfer with Mrs. M1, a Kurdish Syrian housewife with a 1-years subsidiary status. As we talk, she runs into another resident from the building who jumps into the conversation. The resident is a married, Muslim woman from Kosovo, whose family has a long-term toleration status, but whose husband has a part-time job stocking shelves at Ikea. Despite her husband's job and small income, they have not been able to afford to move out of the now-condemned building for multiple years. The resident wonders how she can reasonably uproot the things she has gathered in her small space into a new shelter space that will likely be even smaller:

[The woman] has lived [at Shelter 1] for over 7 years. She is worried about the upcoming transfer. She does not know when she will move, or exactly where. But she seems to know that she will only receive a one-room space somewhere. She says, "We are four people. I hear they want to give us only one room. This is not possible with four people. [...] How can you live with four people in only one room? I have been in this [shelter] for seven years. We have two rooms here. I don't complain. [...] Yes, small rooms are okay, small is okay. But just one room? I cannot just live in one room. Or with a kitchen we have to use together? [...] The place itself does not matter. [This shelter], a container, another shelter, it doesn't matter [*egal*]. But I need more than one room. We are four people already." (Field notes, October 11, 2017)

For the shelter residents, such instability drives anxiety about the uncertainty of living status, but the psychological difficulties coping with shelter life in general are also intertwined with physiological effects of living in shelter spaces with so many people for long periods of time, a ubiquitous condition of shelter life. To live with no or minimal privacy, "on top of one another, so close next to each other" seems something that refugees can hardly "survive or endure for very long" (Interview with professional translator, March 26, 2018). According to a mid-20s single refugee from Ghana, who lived over a year in one of Cologne's longest-standing emergency shelters, "many of the problems [in shelter life] come from simply having so many people so close in one space" (Interview with X1, September 1, 2017).

Such afflictions are caused by a variety of elements associated with communal shelter living. There are issues of hygiene, for example. Because there are so many people constantly in a single space, "no matter how much it is cleaned, it cannot be really clean," explains X1 (Interview with X1, September 1, 2017). Mrs. T2, the married Serbian woman with nine children in her current shelter space, whose family has held a toleration status around four years, reports having gotten a severe infection from unhygienic living

conditions while pregnant in an emergency shelter (Field notes, February 27, 2017). Some residents think their children have gotten sick more frequently because of dirty bathrooms and unkempt crowded spaces. Others file petitions to the city for shelter transfers due to health issues (like cancer or hemophilia) that could be exacerbated by unhygienic communal living.

Similar physical and psychological problems arise from the lack of privacy, as both residents and experts with experience in shelters describe. “Without any cover of privacy, without anything, just lying shoulder to shoulder with the other refugees,” explains a security guard who has worked at a variety of emergency, container and purpose-built shelters, “I can imagine how quickly one would come to consider the situation as inhuman or hardly a rescue to be there, but rather as something completely unfathomable” (Interview with shelter security guard, January 28, 2018). Especially in settings where accommodations (like sleeping rooms, bathrooms, kitchens and limited open spaces) are shared, life occurs under a fog of constant noise. Even when rooms are private, many residents still live extremely close to one another. Across conversations, they often speak of the inability to concentrate on tasks that require some focus, such as language learning, translating documents or homework from integration courses because silence is absent. They complain of headaches, high blood pressure and the consistent inability to sleep from various forms of racket, like loud music, yelling, fighting or simply the white noise of tens or hundreds of people going about. There is the stress of never really being alone and always feeling on display. “We just want to be able to sit alone in our own house with each other,” explains Mr. M1, a Kurdish Syrian father of four with a 1-year subsidiary status (Interview with Family M1, September 26, 2017). As they are practicing Muslims, his wife wants to feel comfortable being without her hijab in her own rooms, without threat of constant interruption or general lack of privacy. His older children, who still often experience stomach problems, incontinence and nightmares, want their own peace and privacy to rest without embarrassment.

As the proximity to one another is never lessened, physical and psychological stresses are aggravated through time through the threat of violence and the witnessing of interpersonal conflicts that makes individuals question the safety and security of their living spaces. Residents describe some conflicts as somewhat more banal than others, playground fights amongst children, for example, that are frequently a result of differing parental discipline styles or minor verbal skirmishes between adults that go unresolved or unreported due to paranoia to be blamed for instigating anything. Other times, they are far more onerous; instances of the effects of alcoholism, domestic violence, ethnicity-based conflicts or violent responses to transgressions such as stealing. Conflict is seen as an unavoidable aspect of shelter life, explains Mr. W1, the former Albanian musician with a toleration status who had lived in five shelters during just over two years in Germany. It is the result of so many people living together for such long periods under great stress:

Sometimes groups of people do not want to mix cultures. [...] People in the beginning, when there was only one home here, it was much more peaceful. Now so many more people here makes it difficult. People were much more tolerant when the house was smaller. (Interview with W1, August 5, 2017)

Together these conditions contribute to the general dissatisfaction with daily life there, intensifying feelings of idleness, stagnation and trauma. Reflecting on shelter life soon after her family finally moved to a new apartment, Mrs. A2, a young Afghani housewife with two children and a 1-year subsidiary protection status, notes how shelter living intertwines physical and mental struggles:

It was also really loud. And there were many problems. Always, somebody didn't clean the stairs. The washing machines are broken. Somebody is fighting with somebody else again. I would stand at the window sometimes, and my head would pound and hurt. It was so loud. I know I had problems, I was depressed, and sometimes, I would just be at home and cry and cry. (Field notes, March 22, 2018)

Mr. H1, a former news cameraman in Iraq with a wife and two children who hold 1-year subsidiary protection status, reflects similarly on the cumulative physical and mental effects of shelter living. As he also reflects on his upcoming shelter transfer, due to the building condemnation in Shelter 1, he notes how such conditions of shelter living affect his outlook on life, that is, they become more downcast:

Conditions are so difficult here. When it is so dirty or physically difficult or disgusting, like with everybody sharing toilets, it makes it difficult to feel positive about anything. (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017)

Perhaps the pained memories of Mrs. F2, a former grade school math teacher in Afghanistan whose family has a 1-year subsidiary protection status, summarize the themes of mental and physical difficulties most acutely. As she relays memories about her family's time in two emergency shelters, she notes how she felt both psychologically and physically debilitated from the conditions and the violence she witnessed there. For her, shelters can be considered a place of personal destitution, not only because they remind her of what she fled, but because they bring about despair in so many elements of daily living:

We were moved to a gymnasium [*Turnhalle*] in the Buchheim district. We spent about four months there. There, I was so sick, do you understand? Physically, I was weak, and I hurt everywhere. I had problems with my menstrual cycles and pains in my stomach. I suffered so much psychologically. What I saw was too much. Nobody should see it. (Mrs. F2 begins to weep. Her daughter runs to get her a tissue. I pause and remind her we do not need to continue if it is too difficult. She decides to continue after a short pause.) It's just that I saw so much in the shelter. So many people were drunk, completely deranged. They would fight all the time and beat each other. It just brought me straight back to Afghanistan. I knew we had to get out of there. I suffered all the time from sickness and these nerves. [...] Then, we were transferred to the main emergency shelter in Cologne. It was hardly better there. [...] There continued to be more fights, more beatings. (Interview with F2, February 9, 2018).

The challenging qualities of shelter life—the lack of space, lack of privacy, rudimentary physical conditions, poor hygiene, conflict—come together to affect material, physiological, psychological and social assets of everyday living, such that residents hardly view shelters as homes at all. Nothing except the concept of shelter itself is necessarily desirable, as Mr. and Mrs. H1 confirm the sentiments of many others:

We need an apartment the most of all. We want our own rooms, for us and for the kids. It is too hard to all be together where nobody has their own space. We really want a better space to cook. Generally, as for things, we seem to have what we need. We have basic items. But can you see? [He gestures to the cabinets and bags in the room.] Everything is all here on top of itself, all in one room. We also wish some of the materials or appliances here were more reliable or better. The oven unit here doesn't work. When you turn on one burner, another doesn't function. But it belongs here and it is hard to fix. (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017)

In the study context, to leave crude, shelter accommodations is thus often the first step to improving agency in the form of a material asset that subsequently improves mental and physical assets, without which life can languish at the lowest threshold of sustenance, regardless of legal status (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017). Without a home, agency is burdened by physical instability and psychological uncertainty that permeates and impedes the very cadence of daily living. "With no apartment," explains Mr. H1, "it means too many transfers to places with very bad conditions. And with this, we are always waiting" (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017).

7.1.2 Living through differences in assets and capabilities

Along with the psychological, physical and material shortcomings of shelter life, so too are shortcomings in interpersonal social and informational assets manifested in the study context, as so many different people share the same spaces. The residents in refugee shelters often have nowhere else to go

practically speaking, and they are pursuing residency statuses through asylum-seeking channels. But despite this broadly shared condition, refugee shelters are hardly homogeneous spaces. “In a large accommodation,” explains a municipal ombudsperson in charge of investigating refugees’ complaints in their living situations, “There are simply a large number of people who are not familiar to one another” (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017). Residents bring their own experiences and backgrounds with them, for example, differing in terms of human capital and legal assets. These individual differences can simultaneously exert their own influences on developing social and organizational components of agency within shelter life. A shelter social worker emphasizes this:

Of course, the parents have a very different need than the children and adolescents, and the elderly or sick bring their own needs. And we have them all. [...] We have a very mixed clientele in here and many different countries of origin, many different residence permits. A lot of them are here together, but that’s why the needs are very different. (Interview social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018)

In the study context, residents living with differences in financial, legal, educational, cultural and social assets can mean that finding common points of identification with other residents is difficult, exacerbated by the lack of common language. These differences grow with few channels to increase understanding, leading to their own influences on the psychological, social and organizational assets of individual residents within shelter environments.

In conversations and observations of shelter life, legal status often plays a prominent role in the division of residents. Shelters are not merely places to house recognized refugees, but also asylum seekers, those with a tolerated status and those awaiting deportation. In the years after the fieldwork period, asylum seekers with low prospects to remain became more restricted in terms of their housing within specific types of shelters or even movement between shelters, often remaining in the same shelter facility throughout the duration of their claim adjudication. This was not the case between 2017 and 2018, however. In the study context, movement between shelters is frequent, regardless of legal status. The fieldwork shelters house residents with all types of legal residency statuses. Especially when residents come from the same countries, they wonder why they have received one status when a similar family has received another (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1). “Why only 1-year papers [for us]?” Mrs. M1 frequently asks (Field notes, July 17, 2017). Her questions persist more specifically when she refers to her upstairs neighbor, Mrs. P2, who is also a Kurdish Syrian, but has a full refugee recognition status and 3-year residency permit, the “right papers” as Mrs. P2 refers to them and what Mrs. M1’s family so desperately hopes for (Field notes, May 11, 2018).

Corresponding financial and legal assets differ with status and the benefits received accordingly. As Liedtke (2016) explains, “Positions within the political and legal framework of the German welfare state lead to a hierarchy of welfare receivers mirrored in their different residential statuses” (p. 480). VM, an educated, single male asylum seeker from Bangladesh, confirms how these entitlement and status differences can cause divisive perceptions:

I think the distribution system of benefits and help might improve. I feel Arabs sometimes have more advantage. They get more things because some of them come from countries that the authorities have a high chance to stay. Or, many of the authorities already speak Arabic. So, sometimes it feels like these people get more advantages than other people from say, Africa or Asia. Things are harder for us. (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

Similarly, some residents see themselves as having nothing or not enough, while it appears outwardly that others might receive more. Mrs. M1 considers how she furnishes much of her shelter room from sifting through the trash and wonders how it seems others can buy more new things than she can:

Look, they also have all these new things in their apartments because they have so much money. Do you know, everything is new in Mrs. T2's apartment? The shelves on the wall? The cupboards? You know how we have ours here? They took all that out [of their place] and threw it away. (Field notes, January 11, 2018)

Mrs. T2, a former Muslim, now Christian Roma woman originally from Serbia, has nine children and has held a toleration status for over four years; the financial and legal specifics of her case are quite different than that of Mrs. M1, who is a practicing Muslim Kurdish Syrian and has been in Germany a shorter time, has four children and possesses a subsidiary protection status. But when benefits are determined on various factors and vary with case complexity—time in country, status of asylum application, probability of a successful application, number of children and so forth—the underlying specifics of others' individual cases seem hardly easily knowable to others from outward, superficial contact.

Human capital skills differ similarly with varying levels of work experience, education and language backgrounds. The number of origin countries represented in the shelters where I worked ranged from less than 10 to over 20. In just one wing of Shelter 1, for example, residents come not only from war-torn Syria and Iraq, but China, Georgia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Ghana and Nigeria. In the second wing of the facility, there are also families from Turkey, Afghanistan and Serbia. All the residents here speak drastically different levels of German, and only the two African refugees speak English to one another, but do not share their local native languages. The ethnic and linguistic dynamics are similar at all the shelters I encounter (Appendix C). Educational backgrounds of residents can be similarly divisive. A3, for example, a professional lawyer and business owner from Syria proficient in Arabic and English (but neither Kurdish nor German), lives above a minimally literate housewife, a Kurdish Syrian who prefers to speak Kurdish over Arabic. Although some of her other neighbors, and even a roommate, are also Syrian, they ultimately interact little. When asked about whether or not they are friends, she cringes and talks about how they are more simple people who would not understand her; they are women who cannot read and write like she can and who do not spend the day like she does (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018). VM, the Bangladeshi male asylum seeker, trained as an accountant, feels similarly when describing other Bangladeshi people from his shelter (including his roommate), who come from rural backgrounds; he says he feels fundamentally different from them because they “are just not educated as people” (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017).

As these backgrounds, abilities and experiences differ, so too do individuals' needs for social support. Regardless of the channel for help—be it that of family, volunteers, organizations or rarely, one another—these individual differences command different types of social or organizational engagements at the level of each family. Some, like E1, X1 or many of the single women with children, feel truly alone, with little support to help them care for their children. They are often stuck in shelters, unable to attend language or training courses, as they wait for places in childcare centers, so they seek connections to improve access to both childcare and language learning. Others have more extensive or established family networks already nearby—siblings, cousins or long-time family friends—which they attempt to utilize for emotional or monetary support. Others lack the ability to utilize these networks because they are in other cities which are difficult to travel to or because their families share the same predicaments, so they seek connections to volunteers or organizations who can bridge these gaps. For some, there must be a more hands-on, fundamental degree of guidance in learning about everyday life in Germany, as particular struggles adjusting to life in a developed country come from their humble backgrounds; for example, one Yazidi woman, Mrs. G1, has difficulty shopping in the grocery store due to illiteracy in her native language (Interview with Red Cross shelter volunteer, January 19, 2018). For others with more erudite backgrounds, they seek connections that might help them address their struggles to find activities of interest catered to their own more specialized experiences. Big families often seek channels to connect them to more material support for their children's needs, such as clothes and school supplies. Single-male refugees, on the other hand, are often more concerned with finding ways to combat the idleness that comes with being unable to work.

When the backgrounds, assets and capabilities of individual families can be so different, along with their corresponding specific needs of social learning, growing and helping, it is difficult for them to see and take advantages of what commonalities that do exist among one another. It is correspondingly difficult to find ways to communicate these differences and similarities. Mrs. UB, a married Kurdish woman from Syria with a 1-year subsidiary protection status, who used to be a news editor, reflects on feeling alone with few ways to reach out to other residents:

“It is hard to find people to have a dialog with. [...] There is nobody for dialog.” [...] She tells me that when she is not at school, she is alone at home [at the container shelter], and this hard for her. She wants to talk to more people, but there is nobody to talk to and practice German with. (Field notes, March 7, 2018)

Fundamentally, “We have different discussions from one another. We cannot understand each other,” explains Mr. M1, the Kurdish Syrian father of four with a 1-year subsidiary status, reflecting on these contentious dynamics of living space (Interview with Family M1, September 24, 2017). As such, residents often recede into their own ethnic or linguistic enclaves within shelters, small as they may be, because there are not more obvious ways for them to develop social or organizational assets with other residents, based on their common experiences of flight (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018). Shelter life may be friendly, but often without friends, VM clarifies. “Background differences prevent [us] from fully getting along” (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017).

7.1.2.1 Information shortfalls and misunderstanding

When shelter diversity means that reliable ways to identify and communicate with one another are strained, families see differences and inequalities, but cannot rectify them. It is difficult to understand why some people have certain things and others do not, why some people have received certain things and others not. When reliable ways to communicate with one another are strained, talking to one another to find these things out is not necessarily common, nor always is sharing in between people.

This manifests first in a lack of informational assets with regards to one another, often leading to “have” and “have not” perceptions that drive envy and misunderstandings as opposed to mutual understandings that might create stronger bases for shelter-based networking or the development of shelter-based organizational or social assets. Differences, especially material or service-driven ones, are often more easily perceptible than similarities. Mr. H1, the Sorani Kurdish former camera man with a 1-year subsidiary status, describes his family’s experiences as such:

It is difficult to make connections with people because things always feel unfair and uncomfortable living here [at the shelter]. There are other families who have fewer people, but more rooms. Why do I have only one room for the four of us, with all of our things here, when other families with fewer people get more? Or why is there only washing allowed one time a week for the four of us? It just seems unfair. (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017)

As it becomes difficult to identify with one another, many residents may see themselves as distinct from others, although presumably all shelter residents have gone through, at a minimum, similar bureaucratic procedures in filing their asylum claims and, perhaps more deeply, similar traumas of flight. When individual residents are presumably struggling in some fundamentally similar ways from being refugee migrants, but their situations may be governed differently while living in the same shared spaces, the more obvious differences can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings, as a TSO leader explains via experiences of attempting to administer effective support programs:

The distinctions do not make sense. [...] There are many psychological and emotional problems due to fleeing in general. [...] Where there should be solutions, I would say: language [integration] courses for everyone. Consulting advice for everyone, so that they get oriented, and through that, [find] self-reliance, not through the state, but in whatever form of school and professional integration quickly, from the beginning. [...] It [can] apply to everyone in general. [...] Because of course that's completely frustrating when I live in a shelter and my Syrian and Iraqi neighbors are allowed to take the language course, and I can't because I'm from Africa. Awful. That doesn't just result in tiffs, but jealously and similar [feelings]. (Interview with leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie, March 6, 2018)

Indeed, this frustration is apparent for shelter residents like Mrs. M1 and Mrs. H5 (from Syria and Afghanistan, respectively), who see their own sufferings and problems as both straightforward, but also individual. Mrs. M1 laments, when describing her perceptions about other shelter residents receiving specific benefits she does not as a holder of a subsidiary protection status:

Why not me? I don't understand [the others] because they don't have problems like we do. When people come from Iran, Afghanistan, it's not like it is in Syria, where everybody is dead and there is war. I come from Syria, so I bring my problems with me, and I get nothing back for them. (Field notes, April 29, 2018)

Mrs. H5 questions similarly, not understanding why her family received a toleration status:

I do not know why we just got a *Duldung* for one year. We have filed a complaint against it. Why just this? We don't understand. We come from Afghanistan. There is war there and many problems. (Field notes, April 17, 2018)

Despite being neighbors at the same shelter, practicing Muslims and regular attendees at the same women's networking cafe, they have difficulty seeing and benefitting from the shared similarities of their histories together, especially since they both speak basic German and do not share another common language. Instead, they see them as their own, and their lack of information grows along with the division between them. To one another, their potentially shared experiences are not seen as potential social or organizational assets to utilize for coping or possible change.

Such divisions can bleed further into more areas of misunderstanding, in which lacking information about one another can evolve to become a more generalized lack of knowledge with regards to legal status, shelter rules or service availability. In the study context, a common theme is that being unable to discuss experiences more deeply can lead to personal anxieties about one's own individual case, lacking adequate amounts of information (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1). C3, a single woman from Ghana whose case has a presumed low probability of success due to where she is from, experiences these types of mental highs and lows as she struggles to understand the complexities of her legal situation, especially when compared to another female refugee migrant from Ghana she speaks to. It is difficult to understand the complexities of this other woman's case and why she might receive benefits that C3 does not, but the discrepancy and inability to fully understand cause both confusion and hope about her own case more generally:

This [other refugee Ghanaian] woman has shown C3 her own statements about money payments from the *Sozialamt* and discussed with her the amount of money she thinks C3 should be getting. C3 has wondered, for example, why she is not getting a child payment for her daughter [*Kindergeld*], when this other woman is. This other woman has also just received a 2-year residence permit, so she has encouraged C3 to keep following up with her questions and given her hope that perhaps her claim might also be decided positively. (Field notes, November 1, 2017)

For many residents, this cadence of mental highs and lows is common when attempting to obtain and decipher information from others in these complicated settings. Initial hope of potentially finding a commonality gives way to skepticism upon the realization that observable experiences seem to point to fundamental differences. Attempts at friendly existence give way to frustrations and confusion about why

some trajectories are so different from one another. Mr. W1, for example, questions why so many people from Albania are deported, despite their struggles or even character in obeying the law and attempting to work hard. Albania may not have war in the same way as Syria, but he notes how he perceives that many people from specific countries “have cards [permission] from day one, from the minute they arrive. But, despite this, they steal, they are thieves, they even do drugs. But there are so many good Albanians who return home regardless without reason” (Interview with W1, August 5, 2017). Mr. W1 attaches himself to the observable differences in everyday shelter life that diminish even his lay understanding of how the laws ought to function, placing his sympathies namely with those like him. For Mrs. M1 and her family, this similar lack of information and understanding of others affects her entire outlook on life in Germany, causing her to wonder if the laws are fairly applied and why it continues to seem so difficult for her family to move on:

She keeps saying, “Why do we sit? I can work. My husband can work. I do not just want money from the Job Center. We can work.” [...] She implies having difficulties coping sometimes, perhaps with different motivation levels amongst residents. She says, “The Albanians, the Serbians, they sit here a long time. They sit, eat, drink, sleep, dance, have music. Why? Is Albania bad? Is Kosovo bad like Syria? They just sit. But I do not want to sit and get money from the Job Center. We can work.” (Field notes, July 31, 2017) [A few months later, she comments similarly.] “Iranians, they can get help too. I have seen the Serbians get special help, but they drink, they play loud music. How come not me? Their kids are not very good. But every day, we are here. We tell our kids, learn, go to school. We go to school. But we don't get help.” (Field notes, January 11, 2018)

7.1.2.2 Distrust of others

In the study context, with few ways to share information together, and the lack of it exacerbating differences, relations between shelter residents can often become superficial or distant, but also antagonistic or distrustful. Understandably, residents often tell me they do not consider their shelter neighbors their friends; therefore, they do not know if it would be helpful to speak to others for purposes of communal organization, problem solving, help or coping simply because their words may mean little. Instead, many prefer not to socialize too much with others and instead keep to themselves. The development of social assets within shelters is burdened by fear or distrust of others, as they remain unknowable. With few ways to communicate, conflict and misunderstandings are difficult to mediate between individuals, causing further reluctance to want to interact and reinforcing distance. Mr. H1 explains how he perceives that these types of differences can drive interpersonal resentment:

Even [his more preferred social worker at the shelter] also makes problems. “There was a Russian family whose kids were fighting and badly behaved, but the family complained to the office about how hard their life was here and then, they were rewarded for their complains and got to move to another home because [The social worker] also knows Russian. It's Vitamin B [*Vitamin B*] you see? It's clear. Another time, I had to clean the hall for 27 days because [the other shelter social worker] said somebody said my daughter did something bad, but I didn't understand. It didn't seem fair to me. (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017)¹¹²

Aside from these sorts of difficulties in mitigating interpersonal conflicts, the lack of ways to communicate also makes false nature in others more difficult to distinguish, so residents often feel wary they could form genuine relationships to begin with. E1, the Cameroonian single-mother asylum seeker, explains that many “people may not want to trust. Many of them, many, many, have false stories. Everybody can be full of false stories. So [...] they want to shut up inside” (Field notes, February 8, 2018). VJ, a security guard who has worked at a variety of refugee shelters, also notes that residents:

¹¹² The *B* in the German phrase *Vitamin B* refers to *Beziehungen*, or relationships. The phrase is a colloquialism that usually refers to nepotism in job contacts, but can also be used to describe general favoritism in a situation due to an individual's personal connections or network.

[...] are often very afraid. They don't know who [anyone is]. They don't know who they should and should not talk to. [...] Maybe if they say something, something could happen later. So, they prefer to say nothing.” (Field notes, February 19, 2018)

Mr. SM's family, Kurdish Syrians with a fully recognized status, feels similarly as they speak generally about their current lives in a container shelter, as well as their past shelter experiences:

“I have no idea who is nice and who isn't nice,” his son explains. “It's better to stay home, so I don't get overwhelmed. We don't know the other people, who they are at all. The police might come around later and say, you were with this man, you know him; he did something and maybe you did it too, when actually you don't know him. Yes, better to just be alone with my family.” (Field notes, May 5, 2018)

Mrs. M1, living with a 1-year subsidiary status at a different shelter than Mr. SM, expresses an almost exact sentiment, as she tells me why she doesn't enjoy going to other residents' rooms:

I stay here a lot. I didn't come to Germany to have problems, and I don't know who is good, who isn't good. Sometimes, you go to people's places and the kids fight, or they [neighbors] fight. Or, sometimes your kids might go and play with their kids, then the kids or the family fights and the police come; then what? (Field notes, March 1, 2018)

Even the municipal ombudsperson, in charge of investigating refugees' formally filed complaints about shelter living, describes this very antagonism perpetuated in shelter environments by this lack of understanding and related distrust. To her, these stem from the lack of ability to interface effectively with one another, as paranoia of interaction exacerbates conflict and alienation further:

There are so many individuals who, even if they are not directly involved in an attack or assault, can ensure through their behavior that somebody says something or doesn't. We get the impression from some complaints we have reviewed here that the atmosphere and the structure there [at shelters] mean that one does not wish to speak up too much. (Interview with municipal ombudsperson, December 5, 2017)

Ultimately, conditions of shelter living affect various components of residents' agency. There are, on the one hand, the physiological and material hardships of being in basic or deteriorating communal spaces, especially for long periods of time. Despite receiving the rote benefit of shelter that prevents homelessness, refugees in the study context cannot always accumulate vast amounts of material goods to make themselves more comfortable. Crowded living spaces further exacerbate the effects of stress and disease, curtailing assets of physical and mental health. But there are also the informational and social deficits caused by the diversity in shelter spaces. Especially when outward differences in benefits or help received are more apparent to observe with less interpersonal interaction, individual explanatory details or deeper similarities to one another are difficult to understand. When there are few ways to bridge communication gaps to obtain this better understanding, information about each other becomes scarce. Fear grows, along with distrust. Social and organizational assets in the form of connections with other residents are impaired because there is little practical way to overcome what appear to be too many differences, too many inequalities, too many risks that might bring more trouble into an already unstable state of living.

7.2 Shelter governmental institutional structures and limitations

In the sociocultural domain, the specific legal systems that most influence refugees' agency and goals are those regulating the management and provisioning of living spaces, to include locational residential obligations and shelter oversight. Together, these structures determine the type and quality of housing provided and when, along with the activities permitted and regulated within shelters. Fundamentally, the

provisioning of housing avoids wide scale homelessness, accounting for housing as a basic human need and promoting general public order. But, as in the economic and political domains, in the local context, implementation capacity in housing policy has been challenged both by the structural complexity of administration, along with the instability of housing-related resources, given the uncertainty of rapidly changing refugee numbers in a short period of time. These qualities of the opportunity structure have resulted in varying physical conditions of shelters, a regulatory paradox of protracted temporary living conditions and an over reliance on support organizations acting as further extensions of governance structures, limiting openness in entry points for refugees' own change or bottom-up flexibility.

7.2.1 Complexity in administration and organization of shelter spaces

Given the surges of recent refugee migration, the systems of mass housing provisioning in Germany generally show success in that they have fulfilled a basic premise to give shelter to thousands of individuals who would otherwise have no place to go. Similarly in Cologne's context, they run, at least, to fulfill the most essential functions (Interview with university researcher, November 14, 2017), in that "everybody has a roof over their heads and food, these are not issues" (Interview, social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018). But as months and years from the initial influxes pass, publicly provided, non-private, communal shelter spaces remain the predominant living arrangement for refugees across the city. As participating refugees describe looking towards the future—to moving on—and thus to fulfilling more existential needs like controlling their own domestic spaces and joining communities, the complexity of opportunity structures managing the nature of housing has largely slowed its alignment with these goals. As housing provisioning stretches across various levels of responsibility—from federal mandates to state directives to municipal and TSO discretion in implementation—the complexity has manifested in restrictive structures implemented at multiple levels, creating fewer points of entry for refugees' more direct application of choice to change and encounter them.

7.2.1.1 Shelter provisioning and residential obligations

The provisioning of shelter, along with residency and movement restrictions, are tied to multiple legal components of asylum status and benefits administration, together contributing to the complex levels of responsibility and execution. Recognized refugees, asylum seekers, people with toleration status and fundamentally any person living in Germany (including undocumented migrants) are provided housing based on a variety of directives. AsylbLG federally commands that shelter is a type of benefit to be provided for asylum seekers and people with a toleration status. Housing benefits for recognized refugees are handled via the unemployment welfare schemes that apply to working-aged Germans and other legal migrants, that is, SGB II. Separately, AsylG (Sections 44.1, 47), obliges states specifically to establish and oversee these shelter facilities; in fact, there are no such facilities managed at the federal level (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015; Kalkmann, 2017). In turn, individual state laws regulate both the provisioning of facilities accommodating asylum seekers until they can be further distributed throughout the country via the federal quota process, as well as eventually to municipal facilities, in that municipalities are required by law (in NRW, FlüAG, Section 1 and the Residence Regulation for Foreigners, *Ausländer-Wohnsitzregelungsverordnung*, AWoV, Section 3) to accept and accommodate the foreign asylum seekers assigned to them directly. Additionally, the NRW state Law of Public Order (*Ordnungsbehördengesetz*, OBG) gives municipalities the authority to take measures to avoid homelessness, a threat to public order and safety, which also underscores housing necessity for individuals in all stages of the asylum process, undocumented migrants and other individuals with no means of self-support, who would otherwise be homeless. The type of shelter where asylum seekers, recognized refugees or tolerated persons live depends on various factors, per federal and state law, along with municipal policy: time in country, stage of asylum application processing, country of origin, facility capacity and, in some instances, individual needs.

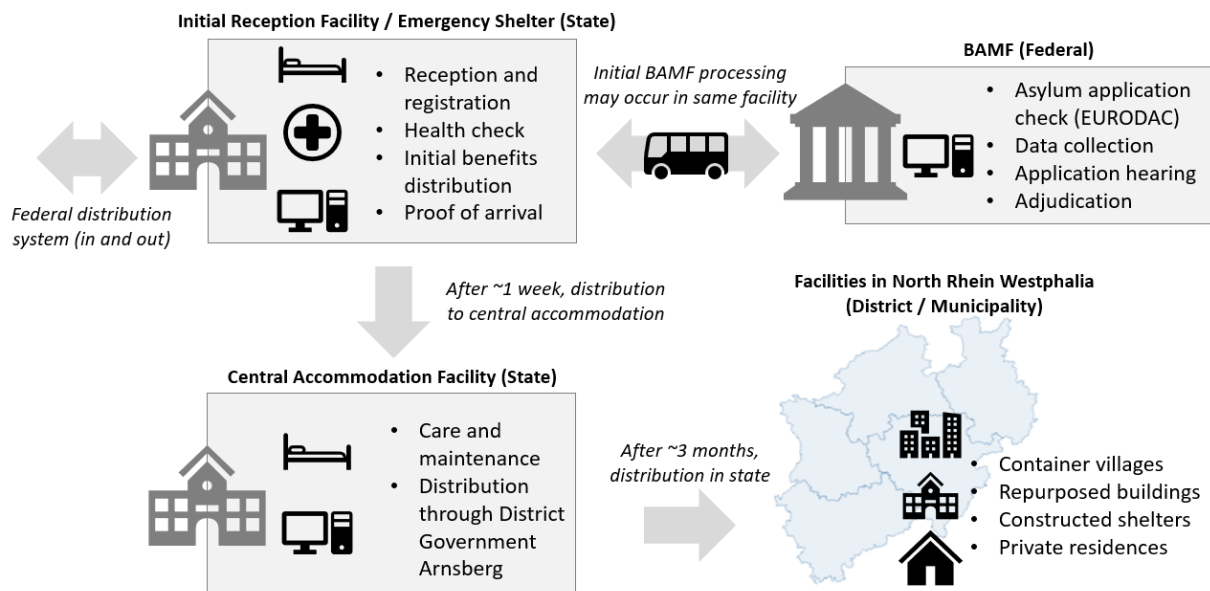


Figure 14. Shelter distribution and provisioning process in North Rhine Westphalia (author illustration based on Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015).

In NRW and Cologne, there are three types of accommodation accounted for within this process (Figure 14): initial reception facilities (*Aufnahmeinrichtung* or *Erstaufnahmeinrichtungen* in NRW), state-overseen collective accommodation facilities (*Zentralen Unterbringungseinrichtungen* in NRW) and municipal shelter facilities. The first point of accommodation is a state-managed initial reception facility, where migrants go as soon as their presence has been documented by BAMF authorities (BAMF, 2016c). In some instances, BAMF personnel work within the facility to process asylum application data and oversee all elements of the asylum process (AIDA, 2017a). At these initial facilities, asylum seekers receive a health examination and initial residency registration paperwork, serving as proof of arrival in country. These facilities also serve as first collection points for asylum seekers transferred into the state from others, per the federal distribution system. At the end of 2017, per BAMF, NRW had five such arrival centers (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015; Kalkmann, 2017), reduced to four by the end of 2018 (Kalkmann, 2019). In the ideal execution of procedure, a stay in such a facility, according to state guidelines, ought to last around a week (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015). Stays are often lengthened if the centers do not have access to necessary medical equipment (namely, x-rays) to conduct all components of the health screening (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). After this initial processing, in NRW, asylum seekers are transferred to state-run collective accommodation facilities. At the time of fieldwork, NRW possessed 24 such facilities (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018). Time in these facilities ought to last around three months, while the District Government in Arnsberg disperses individuals to municipalities per state quotas (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015; AsylG, Section 45; AsylbLG, Section 10). The legal transformation of refugee migrants from *Asylsuchende* (asylum seekers with no formally registered claim) to *Asylantragstellende* (those with a registered claim) can and ought to theoretically happen almost immediately within the first shelter, but this registration does not always occur in practice (Kalkmann, 2019). The formal claim registration can also occur at BAMF facilities or different types of shelters after transfers have elapsed, often due to system processing overloads during the fieldwork time frame.

Eventually, individuals with both in-progress and completed asylum applications are transferred to the administrative bounds of the municipalities in which the state assigns them to live. The municipalities establish and maintain additional shelter facilities for these individuals, including recognized refugees and those with a protection status, who cannot provide themselves with housing (Email communication, municipal Housing Office, July 2, 2019). In that overflow structures have been frequently required to shelter higher than expected numbers of individuals at any given time, these temporary facilities across all stages of

the process have also been referred to as emergency shelters (*Notunterkünften*) (Kalkmann, 2017). At both state and municipal levels, the high numbers of individuals at all stages of the asylum process could not always be housed in designated facilities and thus had to be accommodated in provisional complexes such as old barracks, tent cities, gymnasiums, sport halls and modular, quickly built structures with few interior walls (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015; Gluns & Grabbe, 2018; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017).

Regarding the nature of shelter provisioning, AsylbLG generally regulates the various monetary, physical and health benefits that states must account for within the structures of reception facilities and shelter accommodation, to include “basic benefits for food, housing, heating, clothing, healthcare and personal hygiene, as well as household durables and consumables, benefits to cover personal daily requirements and benefits in case of sickness, pregnancy and birth” (BAMF, 2016c, p. 10). SGB II outlines further benefits for refugees and those who meet such standards of provisioning, based on time in country (Chapter 6). However, there are simultaneously no national minimum standards for shelter design or quality (Kalkmann, 2019), and both states and municipalities have the authority to create and enforce their own regulatory standards in this regard. In NRW, municipalities propose and design the construction of these facilities, but are still generally bound by local conventional building and planning codes, except in narrow circumstances for the emergency, short-term use of certain types of structures (Bezirksregierung Köln, 2015, Section 5). The responsible authorities at the municipal level can similarly decide how specifically shelters are managed, that is, directly through government oversight or through third-sector, charity-provisioning organizations or specific facility management companies (Kalkmann, 2017). Unaccompanied minors are accounted for through separate schemes (SGB VIII, Section 42), and municipalities decide how to account for sheltering individuals with particular health or personal needs that might preclude mainstream shelter accommodation (such as sicknesses, sexual identity, pregnancy status or single travelers).

Fundamentally, individuals in all stages of the asylum process—but in particular when sorted through quota systems—do not have choice in where they are assigned to live; even when personal circumstances might dictate unique considerations, applications must be made to local authorities, who grant and manage exceptions. Upon arrival in country, they are housed immediately within the initial accommodation facilities closest to where their documentation is taking place (BAMF, 2016c). Soon after, asylum seekers are distributed within Germany according to a federal process known as EASY, which aims for suitable and equitable division across each state (BAMF, 2016c). Distribution is based on three primary factors: capacities of state reception centers; potential country-of-origin related expertise within specific regional BAMF offices; and a federally based quota system calculation (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*) which accounts for state tax revenue and number of residents (BAMF, 2016c; Kalkmann, 2017). A similar distribution—based on urban space, population and employment statistics to maintain more equitable burdens among municipalities—happens again at the state level to municipalities (AWoV, Section 4). AsylG (Section 47.1) similarly stipulates that stays in state initial reception facilities should not last longer than six months; however, asylum applicants from safe countries of origin are theoretically required to stay in initial accommodation facilities for the entirety of their asylum procedures (AsylG, Section 47.1a). This restriction on safe origin countries was imposed in October 2015, although by July 2017, a change to AsylG (Section 47.1b) allowed states to impose obligatory stays in initial reception centers up to 24 months on all asylum seekers (Kalkmann, 2017).¹¹³ Although asylum seekers can leave the premises of reception centers and facilities at any time, many centers independently require registration with security upon leaving and entering (Kalkmann, 2017). This is also true within individual shelter administration in Cologne, based on observations and interviews with both municipal employees and shelter personnel.

¹¹³ By the middle of 2018, however, only the state of Bavaria had imposed variants of this restriction.

Further control of living and shelter is imposed through so-called federal physical presence limitations (*Residenzpflicht*) and residence restrictions (*Wohnsitzauflage*) (Appendix E). The former regulates the physical presence of asylum seekers and tolerated individuals, who must not leave the municipalities to which they have been assigned, even for short trips or excursions. The latter regulates residency requirements for asylum seekers, recognized refugees and tolerated persons, in that the place of residence must be within the state or district where administrative oversight has been assigned (AsylG, Sections 55.1 and 56.1). Stricter requirements in this regard were enforced with InteG (through modification of AufenthG, Section 12a), intended on the one hand to encourage employment within the current area of resident (BMAS, 2016b), but also prevent the mass exodus of refugees from rural to urban areas that might overly burden state and local benefits systems in areas with potentially more job opportunities (Gesley, 2016).¹¹⁴ Once an individual has been assigned to a specific municipality and receives benefits there, an obligation to remain in the area for up to three years is imposed, unless self-sufficiency through work is demonstrated (AsylG, Section 60). Transfers to other municipalities must be specifically applied for and are usually only granted in very specific circumstances (such as separation from underage children or spouses or specific conditions of illness, dependency or hardship).

In line with state directives, accommodation policies in Cologne are governed by the city council officials and carried out primarily by the municipal Housing Office, the city administrative department most directly responsible for execution (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 6; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017, p. 9). As in any other federalized municipal provisioning context, this adds additional layers of organizational administration and complexity that further regulate the bounds of daily living. Although federalized structures allow for locale-based flexibility in theory by avoiding standardized solutions that might work better in some places than others (Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 51), they also result in policy implementation that can be slow to change and particularly susceptible to changes in political leadership and resource allocation (see, for example, Ottersbach & Prölß, 2011, Section 4). As the provisioning of refugee shelters must fit in line with other municipal building codes and processes, which possess their own implementation complexities, the coordination tasks required to move forward can easily become massively overbearing towards seamless or effective execution. “[Taking] just the example of building accommodation facilities, if you consider everything,” explains the mayor-appointed municipal refugee coordinator, “There are around 12 to 13 offices and departments involved in the process. It can take a very long time to connect each as a point within a series” (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017). At worst, the coordination is “messy,” with arguing and stalemates, balancing the different approaches and interests of these various offices (Interview with leader, municipal Housing Office, November 28, 2017). As responsibilities for different assessments, zoning, coding, building use standards and the like are spread across multiple points of governance, the general, nested “legal hurdles are not small” with regards to administering how and where shelters can be established, managed and used in the long term; in general, these difficult bureaucratic reconciliations of how municipal spaces can be used and repurposed have limited the city’s flexibility in terms of how it might find more creative or higher quality housing solutions (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018).

The system of municipal assignments to shelters is also complex, given the large volumes of people, shelter capacities, the general evolving nature of shelter provisioning from temporary to permanent, the multiple stages of the asylum process that must be accounted for and the specific needs of individuals that housing authorities attempt to accommodate through bureaucratic evaluation systems. One social worker at a large emergency shelter (Shelter 2) describes the system’s complexity of assigning individuals to shelters “like the stock market,” in which city workers seem to barter and trade individuals between facilities (Interview with social worker, Diakonie, February 26, 2018). The perception is not entirely untrue, in that the

¹¹⁴ Appendices D and E summarize the application of these limitations as they apply to each specific group of individuals.

city manages lists of individuals and their current placements, often relying on intervening social workers and individual petitions to direct specific transfers as needed and assist in the management of balancing individual needs with available resources. A manager from the municipal Housing Office describes how this process of assignment gets complex quickly, involving multiple offices and various municipal considerations:

It is decided initially here, yes that is a family that needs a [transfer]. [...] A colleague here assesses [generally] when the family needs another accommodation, what are the possibilities within the system. Where are some free accommodations? What fits? Then of course we don't want a new school change, so if possible, it should be in close proximity. A lot of people say, there ought to be a ranking list, but are there none because so much changes constantly. [...] There is a lot of change [...] needs change. [...] Another aspect is, what is the structure of a shelter? What kind of people live there? Which people fit in well? What does the neighborhood look like? What are the offers in the neighborhood? [...] That's the third aspect that we look at, what do we have in resources [at a facility]? (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

The outcome of these nested federal-to-local regulations is a high degree of instability in living conditions for residents shaping the entirety of shelter living experiences, as a TSO consultant clarifies:

Security [...] is the greatest motivation [...] As long as refugees do not know how long they will stay, there is always a feeling that the brakes are engaged. How much should I bring in here with me, maybe I'll have to leave again? Why should I take up anything here when I just have to leave? This insecurity during the stay affects all behavior. It is certainly not always a conscious process, sometimes an unconscious process, but it has a significant impact. (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018)

For residents, there is instability in time, not knowing exactly when the next transfer will come, or if laws will change to expedite or delay the movements further. There is instability in condition, not knowing exactly what type of facility will come next, be it a temporary structure, a container or an apartment-style unit. There is instability in place, not knowing to where a transfer will lead, to a similar part of the city, a central location or a rural outpost. There is, perhaps most acutely, instability in control, not knowing what social worker or city official might be sympathetic, what application might be approved, what factors might be weighed in the permissions to be sent elsewhere, yet again to a temporary place not of one's own.

7.2.1.2 Third-sector organizations and provisioning management

Adding additional layers of complexity, and as in other domains, TSOs act as an extension of political governance structures in executing the parameters of shelter life and perpetuating the community service offerings available to refugees. In Cologne, the role of TSOs in assisting government actors in this regard has roots in Cologne's long history of supporting civic engagement efforts (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 9). As such, the city depends on the critical role that TSOs play in supporting refugees at the most localized level, relying on these organizations, along with local communities in general, to drive the management and participation of refugees in various iterations of community life, from both perspectives of shelter management and general local involvement within German communities (Aumüller et al., 2015; Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 18).

In the most apparent way, this is accomplished through the management of municipal shelters, none of which are run directly by municipal authorities (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, October 4, 2018; see also, Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 18; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017, p. 22). In Cologne, shelter facilities are run predominantly by eight TSO groups (Appendix G) and supplemented with the services of around 25 private hotel owners who have repurposed their buildings through municipal financing (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, October 4, 2018).¹¹⁵ Overall,

¹¹⁵ The TSOs managing shelters in Cologne include the German Red Cross, Caritas, Diakonie, Diakonie Michaelshofen, the Malteser Aid Society, Phoenix e.V. Internationaler Bund and Social Services of Catholic Men and Women.

contracts with these providers regulate the general standards in the accommodations regarding the tasks and qualification of employees and available support services, presumably according to city standards for refugee accommodation published in 2004 (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 18). In shelters run by TSOs, the organizations tend to directly employ social work staff at the facilities, in order to comply with the ideal municipal standards that call for at least one social worker for every 80 residents (Stadt Köln, 2016). In privately contracted hotel facilities, residents are usually referred to municipal social workers or additional external TSO services to account for a lack of availability of directly employed, on-site staff.

Given the city's historical predisposition towards and culture of civic engagement, Cologne, as the city in NRW with the highest number of foundations and charitable groups, has hundreds of organizations that contribute to general urban service provisioning, social enrichment and community building (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, 2019). Over 150 are related to refugee interests in particular. As such, whether TSO providers are located directly on-site in shelters or within the municipal web of external offerings, municipal provisioning standards position them to assist with refugees' "regular exchange with the system of help that takes place in the social sphere," especially acting as cultural mediators, interpreters and councilors for education, housing and employment opportunities (Stadt Köln, 2016, p. 8). Various TSO offerings throughout the city are thus geared towards these ends, assisting refugees in the form of German language learning, individual case liaising or advisement, pro-bono legal consultation, ethnic or special interest services, sports activities, networking opportunities, city excursions, job search support, skills training, hobby activities, school tutoring, children's play and enrichment services, material donation management and godparent or family partnership matching. A network of 34 neighborhood-based welcome initiatives, built through community volunteer efforts, often provide variants of these offerings in shelters or hotel facilities, working directly with the TSOs managing the shelters and sometimes through municipal grants. Since 2011, the city has also relied on TSO partnerships to formally fund and assist refugees with placement in suitable private accommodations (Stadt Köln, 2017a, p. 9).

For the city, reliance on the structures of TSOs to support shelter management, service offerings and community-based integration efforts has been critical in the most recent years of refugee migration (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018; Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). Simultaneously, as refugees have expanded their presence in local areas, TSO activity has also gained organic footing as individual neighborhood communities want to serve as counter examples to some political narratives that Germans are hostile towards refugees. As one political activist and leader of a local welcome initiative explains, he and various members of his local district considered it "the most normal thing in the world [...] to greet these new neighbors" and find ways to ease the difficulties refugees were experiencing living in the shelters nearby (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, January 25, 2018). "We simply had to do something [in early 2015]," confirms a previous community organizer who pioneered a grass-roots neighborhood effort to gather donations and establish a networking cafe for refugees (Interview with senior volunteer and services coordinator, Diakonie Michaelshoven, November 30, 2017).

By July 2017, the shelter work of TSOs had been further solidified through a nearly €2 million city funding program offering resources towards extra support staff in shelters, more municipal employees working in community-building positions and grants to formally consolidate the network of Welcome Initiatives (Stadt Köln, 2018a). The leader of the Cologne Municipal Integration Center noted these measures as "an essential prerequisite" to being able to sustainably strengthen volunteering and civic engagement structures by formalizing the means of their cooperation with government representatives and services (Stadt Köln, 2018a). TSOs may be technically separate from political governance structures, but they have been key extensions of them in regard to supporting shelter management and promoting community networking, viewed as necessary components without which progress would not be possible:

Above all, the contact point [is] the welcome initiatives in the city for volunteering. That is, when problems become apparent, we usually go to them and see how we can solve them. Not everything is solvable. Not all wishes are achievable. But that's where we talk. We set up the communication directly [with them...]. It is often the case that an initiative comes to us such that we become aware of a problem and then find a solution. (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

Not only are these organizations managers of physical buildings and providers of concrete services in the name of government actors tasking them to do so, they are positioned structurally as points for possible involvement or change, setting up the inherent necessity of intermediaries in this domain (Section 7.3.2).

7.2.2 Instability in mass accommodation management

As in other domains, a context of uncertainty affects the execution of housing provisioning and community building in Cologne. Although the directives to shelter refugees are clear, providing necessary housing to increasing numbers within short time frames has been difficult to implement, given situational instability and related resource constraints amid complex nested regulations and nodes of responsibility.

Presumably, these difficulties have not been exclusively due to a rote lack of planning. The city has, in fact, long acknowledged the need for improved refugee housing provisioning, especially given that political change to address shortfalls began as early as 2003, well before the influxes of 2015 (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017, p. 9). In the early 2000s, in line with similarly restrictive federal attitudes and regulations, municipal approaches to refugee accommodation were ones of “deterrence and exclusion” (Pröhl, 2011, p. 171–172). They favored housing individuals within rudimentary shelter facilities, providing minimal material benefits and presuming deportation as the outcome, as opposed to integration (Pröhl, 2011). Responding to this generally restrictive policy environment, the predominant refugee advocacy organization Kölner Flüchtlingsrat put forth extensive lobbying efforts to the city to improve the living conditions for refugees—to include promoting decentralized housing and more inclusive benefits. The demands were taken up when the municipal political composition changed in 2003, shifting to a more progressive party coalition more sympathetic towards reforming these issues (Pröhl, 2011, p. 172)

In line with pursuing reform, and in cooperation with various TSOs and governmental offices, the city council adopted a set of fundamental standards for the accommodation of refugees in 2004 (Stadt Köln, 2004). The guidelines stressed not only the need for better living conditions more generally, but the importance of dignified and decentralized accommodation that might help to overcome housing challenges limiting a “tolerant coexistence” with refugees (Stadt Köln, 2004, p. 3) and prevented their integration as “a part of an international and intercultural metropolis” (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 12). At least in principle, especially while the numbers of refugees remained lower, the city frequently emphasized its commitment to meeting these standards. Early planning projections in 2013 even warned that greater housing need would likely need to be accounted for in the upcoming years (Stadt Köln, 2015b). Even in the earliest periods of high-level refugee migration, housing planners continued to stress that “the top goal of the administration must continue to be acquiring long-term, usable resources in the form of self-contained [private] residential units distributed throughout the city [...] or taking initiative to build them” (Stadt Köln, 2015b, p. 5).

But despite the foundations for planning that had occurred earlier, housing needs changed too drastically to react and account for the previous slow pace of movement, as the numbers of refugees in the city increased more quickly than planners expected (Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 59). In 2010, Cologne housed only around 1,600 refugee migrants in 29 shelters (Stadt Köln, 2010b). In 2014, around 5,000 required housing (Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 59). By 2016, the number had skyrocketed to just over 13,000 before settling to over 9,600 by the beginning of 2018 (Stadt Köln, 2018d). The then-head of municipal social affairs (and later, mayor of Cologne during the fieldwork period), explained in early 2015 that, although the previous commitments to housing were ideal in theory, instability in migration surges and the unavailability of necessary resources to address them contributed significantly to implementation difficulties:

You have to understand the dynamic. At the end of 2013, we—incidentally, together with charities and refugee experts—assumed that we would have to create 65 places every month. There are now 600. The number has increased tenfold within a short period of time. Nobody could have expected that. Cologne is a growing city with an acute housing problem. The top priority right now is that people don't have to sleep under the bridge. (Faigle, 2015)

The continuously and drastically increasing numbers greatly impaired adherence to the previously defined standards (Gluns & Grabbe, 2018, p. 12), forcing the city to place emphasis on establishing and maintaining emergency accommodations, often in the forms of former warehouses, gyms and ill-provisioned hotels (Aumüller et al., 2015, p. 51–54). In mid-2015, city administration was also forced to accept state-level shelter overflows (Stadt Köln, 2015c, p. 4–5), leading to general shelter overcrowding (that persisted well into the fieldwork period). Resources were further strained by a long-existing and general lack of private and publicly subsidized housing, both “in high demand and short supply” (Interview with leader, municipal Housing Office, November 28, 2017) and suffering from a “limited market” of availability (Interview with municipal politician, Green Party, January 9, 2018). With too many people arriving too quickly to react, the city had few other choices. “The reason for the postponement of the anticipated completion dates” of more permanent housing projects, explains a municipal housing report in mid-2018, “is a complex network of internal and external influencing factors that could not be foreseen to this extent, especially at the time of the respective decision-making, [...] due to the tight housing situation and the imminent threat of homelessness in the time period between 2014 and 2016” (Stadt Köln, 2018d, p. 13). Activist leaders from two Cologne Welcome Initiatives similarly describe the pressure faced by the municipal Housing Office to address the demand for housing in the midst of a situation that could not adequately account for it:

[The head of the Housing Office] often said, “I urgently need places for several hundred [refugees].” But, if this had started earlier, two to three years ago, that is, [building] for places with 40 to 80 [residents,] ten of them could have been generated before needing mass accommodation. (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017)

For us [our advocacy group], the main problem is the housing in mass structures, so clearly, our demand is, to build better. The city could have been building for a long time. There are also a lot of other cities [in Europe], they are much faster. Cologne is working very slowly with regards to coordination. (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018)

In attempts to better systematize this emergency housing provisioning, the city implemented a more delineated four-phase model account for the increasing numbers of refugees (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017). According to the four-phase model (Stadt Köln, 2015a), the first phase would emphasize the acute housing needs of refugees beyond what could be provided within the existing supply of repurposed gyms, sport halls and other buildings (*Notaufnahme* and *Notunterkunft*). It prioritized the construction of new, temporary overflow shelters out of portable materials (*Leichtbauhalle*) to better house the increasing numbers of people and whose long-term residency trajectories were not yet determined. The second phase would transfer people from these open-plan, acute, emergency shelter facilities to those with somewhat more privacy and upgraded conditions. This promoted the use of modular metal container villages (*Mobile Wohneinheit*) and other modifiable existing buildings (*Wohnheim*). The third phase, with a medium-term outlook, would support the “quick” building of simple, purpose-built, apartment-style shelters (*Systembau*), but still requiring a lead time of two to three years (Stadt Köln, 2015a, p. 2). Finally, the fourth phase, although ambiguous in a specific call to action, emphasized the need for ongoing dialog at district and municipal levels about how to solve the aforementioned general housing shortages “within a growing city” (Stadt Köln, 2015a, p. 2).

Considering its acutely developing provisioning context, this model could not necessarily focus first and foremost on designing permanent urban accommodation that would facilitate refugees' easy transitions into society. Rather, the main focus was the legal obligation to avoid homelessness within an acute emergency context (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017, p. 11) and the return of repurposed buildings to their previous use (Stadt Köln, 2015a). Given these situational constraints and objectives, mass accommodation housing facilities were prioritized, more or less out of necessity (Söhn et al., 2017, p. 41). The predominant focus on emergency housing processes has meant that shelters have often failed to meet the various standards set forth and continued to do so well into 2017 (Ottersbach & Widermann, 2017, p. 29), exacerbated by evolving refugee needs and (albeit slower) growing numbers of people, as the leader of the city's refugee coordination office explains:

The Council had previously decided on minimum standards for the accommodation of refugees in Cologne. They were good. They set clear lines. How big a facility can or should be, so on and so forth, with many other conditions. And with the challenge we've had over the past two years, these minimum standards were no longer met. We had to build bigger facilities. Often well below the standards described, simply to offer a roof over people's heads. (Interview, leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force, October 26, 2017)

Implications of this provisional emphasis in the midst of uncertainty lasted well into the fieldwork period. Open-plan gymnasium-style shelters were used until mid-2017, and even when they had been vacated, almost 3,000 refugees still lived in other forms of accommodation with sub-optimal levels of privacy (Stadt Köln, 2018d). In the end of 2015, 64% of refugees were still living in emergency shelters, repurposed sport halls and other crudely built, temporary accommodations (Stadt Köln, 2015d). But by the end of the fieldwork period, the majority of Cologne's refugees still lived in transitional shelters not of their choosing: only 37% of the city's refugees were living in either private residences (24%) or purpose-built, apartment-style shelters (13%) (Stadt Köln, 2018d). As of March 2018, there were still around 90 refugee shelters distributed across the city (Figure 8).

Despite these past challenges, city administration recognizes them profoundly during the fieldwork period and is attempting to move forward reconciling stabilizing uncertainty, administrative complexity and humanitarian needs to provide within the bounds of legal structures. The minimum standards and need for integrative housing are consistently on the mind of relevant local policy makers, who often feel constrained by the instability of past circumstance in how they could act. As the leader of municipal refugee social services for the Red Cross and member of various political municipal integration committees explains:

That trajectory only took place at a time when there were so many people who came to us, that it was clear [...] it would just be too much. [...] The discussion did come up again, trying to consider the minimum standards, how should people live? [...] There was a discrepancy here. It is clear, if there is absolutely no room, so there are container shelters being built because of it, and we have 320 residents to account for—it is not optimal, but it is better than [housing them in] a warehouse facility with open bunks and a noise level so high as to be oppressive. (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017)

There is an acknowledgment and understanding that rudimentary shelter living is not ideal, nor does it contribute to components of agency or goals to move forward towards enhanced community living and integration. As incoming numbers of refugees have stabilized, the city has taken measures to focus on implementing a shift in mindset, in which the new status quo requires that the city must “pay more attention to the quality [of shelters], and this is the basis [moving forward]” (Interview with refugee program consultant, Caritas, January 29, 2018). It is the same sentiment confirmed by the Cologne task force overseeing the streamlining of housing coordination efforts across government departments:

We have come from a real crisis situation where we had to put people mostly in shelters, now we are in a situation where we can start reducing emergency capacities and improving quality (Interview with leader and two staff, Cologne mayoral refugee coordination task force, October 26, 2017).

The city has enacted this commitment in various ways, first by attempting to decrease the numbers of people living in the crudest accommodation types and closing repurposed sport halls by late 2017 (Stadt Köln, 2018a). More stringent minimum standards for shelters were set in July 2017 (Stadt Köln, 2016; Stadt Köln, 2017c). These changes provided improvements regarding the ratio of support staff in shelters, health care access and more streamlined cooperation with voluntary personnel. Further, a better defined “resource management” scheme was planned¹¹⁶ in November 2017 to focus on consolidating shelters when possible, close those in poor condition and alleviating housing scarcity issues by better connecting potential landlords with refugee tenants (Stadt Köln, 2018a). Ongoing measures to continue to move forward in this regard are the topic of dialog in city council endeavors, with relevant policy actors recognizing that protracted, poor living conditions in shelters mean that “the integration factor is approximately zero. [...] But if two of ten families in a private rental facility have a refugee background, then the possibility is far higher [for integration], because they are actively spinning further networks about them” (Stadt Köln, 2017d, p. 42). It is the next iteration of policy, to not lose sight of standards and be able to move towards original, ideal goals:

What is very important to me is that the guidelines that the Council adopted a long time ago still exist in principle. [...] We did not forget that. And we cannot implement them right now. But basically, that’s something we want to go back to. (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

7.2.3 Operational limitations of shelter administrative structures

Despite commitments to improvements, these administrative conditions of shelter living form their own operational implications for the opportunity structure defining shelter living spaces. “With mass accommodation,” explains a local political activist and volunteer reflecting on the exclusionary characteristics that are manifested, “You don’t create integration, in fact, probably the opposite” (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018). Operationally, as complex systems of federal, state and municipal management contend with the instability of provisioning needs in the years of peak refugee inflows, the outcome—instead of more open possibilities for integration and refugees enacting choice within these structures—is that shelters become further extensions of governance. In operation, they play out the nested rule systems of management that inhibit possible bottom-up entry points of change from refugees’ perspectives because everything has already been determined from multiple levels beyond.

Foundational rules and policies for the governance and construction of spaces are adjudicated at the municipal level, based on broader federal directives. Meanwhile, the TSOs managing shelters and their employees become extensions of governing oversight through policy execution. For example, I ask a Red Cross social worker who makes the rules in the shelter where she works. She explains that while the Red Cross has some independent ability to determine them, they “mostly come from the city, and we just administer them” (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, October 4, 2017). Shelter personnel act as mediators helping to enhance the enforcement of building codes, as well as maintain the standards of structure management and coordinate improvements (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018). They are the ones to funnel paperwork and bureaucratic requests through the proper channels, often acting as action points to advance claims forward. Similarly, they determine and enforce individual residential policies in line with general city directives, including the presence of outside visitors, entrance requirements, meal structures, cleaning plans, laundry and kitchen sharing plans. They further facilitate the

¹¹⁶ This priority realignment to reassess issues of quality control and facilities standards prompted the building eviction in Shelter 1 that altered the course of my fieldwork.

provisioning of support services through their own coordination of volunteer channels and available activities. In one brief description, similar to that of other social workers, a shelter social worker lists examples of such tasks:

So, the main tasks here: often, [...] fill out damage reports. [...] There is an incredible amount of work. Everything that is broken, what needs to be repaired, companies must be called. Watching that these tasks get done, that is a big part. [...] Make the space easy to clean, ensure cleanliness, because there is a lot of grime. There is a huge amount of anger among residents, such that you yourself have to communicate, observe to mediate between them. Then, very importantly, ensure that the residents are adequately accounted for by the authorities in relevant positions; I mean, that they get a language course placement, that the children are cared for in a nursery place. Overall, the supply of these general necessities. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018).

In essence, all of the bounds of shelter life seem predetermined by everybody else but residents:

And in every community facility, even if there are closed flats, there are still rules. There are things that the city of Cologne stipulates in the house rules, or in the statute. That means, I am always determined by others. When I have my own apartment with a lease, I can decide who comes to visit and stays for how long. I cannot do that in the shelter, as someone here says visiting hours are only until 10 PM. Overnight visiting does not exist, is not allowed, and so on and so forth. So, these are definitely conflict possibilities that have a concrete effect on family life. (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017)

This “concrete effect” on individual refugee life is that there is limited openness within the opportunity structure to decide the cadence and nature of purely normal activities of being:

What is not good, what makes integration difficult, is simply our requirements in terms of hygiene, fire protection, security, which, on the one hand are very good, but on the other hand, inhibit the normalization of life. (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018)

More possibilities for negotiating and navigating these activities in shelters exist as rules lessen and they become more like individual homes or apartments. Leeway for individual living spaces, for example, is greater in an apartment-style shelters with closed off rooms, where rules do not necessarily dictate as many prohibitions on space use that exist in more temporary structures. But given that all shelters in the city are managed through a central municipal provisioning system, organizational restrictions are still present because actors at levels above refugees are the ones positioned to determine the more salient structural components defining the bounds of shelter living, as a manager from a women’s interest TSO emphasizes:

This example [of bottom-up innovation] is all well and good, what you have just talked about from the refugee camps [in Africa] in terms of what is possible. But in Germany it is not even possible to find a bed sheet in the gym as a privacy cover. Because here comes the regulation: that’s not [possible] due to the fire code. [...] Or the mothers with babies. Maybe they could have organized themselves in the kitchen to take care of their children, but they were not allowed in there. Then, there are the hygiene rules, and that is all very regulated, and therefore I think, such things are not really possible. (Interview with manager, migrant women charity organization, November 20, 2017)

Ultimately, within the local context, the opportunity structure of shelter living positions possibilities for more empowered choices at intermediary levels. Despite the progress being made towards the provisioning system shifting refugees away from shelter living, it is still the predominant manner of structuring refugees’ individual and communal sociocultural living experiences. The execution of housing policy has been affected by complexity and resource constraints that have led to operational constraints in individual entry points for change that, as in other domains, have implications for empowerment outcomes.

7.3 Empowerment outcomes in the sociocultural domain

In the study context, a combination of refugees lacking relevant assets and capabilities and being able to maneuver within a complex, highly top-down opportunity structure leads to some difficulties driving desired choices within the sociocultural domain. On the side of agency, the physical and interpersonal conditions of shelter living mean that refugees do not see shelter spaces as real homes or places to identify with one another. As such, there are fewer material, social and information elements of agency that support executing choices regarding the building of shelter communities or improvements. Similarly, on the side of opportunity structure, administrative complexities in the face of a resource-constrained provisioning environment lead to the micro-management of shelter spaces and protracted stays of uncertainty, in which residents themselves have little choice to intervene. The result of these interactions in the study context is empowerment curtailed in both the presence and execution of choice within the sociocultural domain of shelter living. While residents are able to decide, at some points, how they might become more involved within some service or structural elements of shelter life, they may not always be permitted to build these elements themselves. In other cases, they lack the incentives to do so and do not see choices to get involved as relevant to advancing their personal goals. Instead, the goal that is sought is moving forward to a private residence, beyond shelter life. As in legal and economic domains, empowerment to move forward with these goals and choices frequently rests with intermediary actors who possess more positional flexibility to choose how to change conditions of shelter living, facilitate moves into homes and foster social connections to German networks that inspire more feelings of connectedness. Those without such relationships are often left to feel as they are unable to break through towards their home- and community-making goals.

At the same time, refugees in the study context seek a sense of some personal normalcy amid instability. In the ways they can execute choice in the individual micro-sphere, separate from community interaction, they frequently use what resources are available, especially when regulation is absent, to find ways to prioritize their own family values and the cultural elements of their own individual home lives, revealing some power to make choices about the organization of daily practices and the pursuit of activities that are personally meaningful.

7.3.1 Limitations building homes and communities within existing structures

For refugees to be empowered in the sociocultural domain, they must be able to fulfill their desires to feel a sense of social belonging within new living spaces, as well as to enact their choices for advancing personal values in their domestic spheres of living. The effective realization of these choices can be broadly difficult for refugees in the study context, given that the restrictive components of opportunity structure do not help with reconciling reduced agency in the form of individual diversity and information gaps, as the leader of municipal integration programs explains:

There is no final end. There is the intellectual who fled. There is the man who says, 'I also want to have more money,' who has fled. There is the third one, who flees for a completely other, unknown reason. And so, there's no automatic way for these people to get together. There is also the fact that organization for political purposes serves certain milieus. [...] And in the shelters that is too presumptuous to assume. [...] Because you realize, these are very different social milieus of people. What, then, is their common dominant or 'guiding culture' [*Leitkultur*]? (Interview with leader, municipal integration programs, November 3, 2017)

In other words, executing fruitful choice in the sociocultural domain, especially with regards to community-building at the shelter level, is constrained in elements of both agency and opportunity structure. On the one hand, individual diversity and a lack of means to identify with one another are not easily compatible with the formation of resident-driven community building. This is exacerbated when governance structures of shelters and residence are already so rigid to begin with and lack general entry

points for top-down supported, bottom-up participation. As such, refugees in the study context do not come to see their shelter living spaces as communities, nor each other as community members. They do not feel a sense of identification with one another, nor belonging within their shelter spaces, which limits the effectiveness of choices in attempting to interact systematically with one another.

Feelings of being unable to act productively with one another in shelter spaces stem from the interpersonal components of agency. Without common points of agency to share and apply, the ability or desire to develop bottom-up systems that might collectively improve shelter living appears less likely to form. Via observations and conversations, residents find and choose ways to offer each other casual assistance and circumstantial help, almost always between families who do share at least language commonalities, and often socioeconomic or religious ones in addition. When there are far more commonalities to share, families may choose to see one another as more viable avenues for some forms of rapport building support. They may accompany one another grocery shopping, occasionally watch each other's children, share small food items or offer company to one another. Interactions may be more sporadic or more frequent and can ease some daily burdens of shelter life. But such relationships are highly individualized. As Mr. M1 explains, despite being Muslim, Syrian and a member of a large refugee group more generally, it is far from assured in the uncertainty of shelter spaces to find similar individuals with which to choose to establish a deeper connection of reciprocity:

It is not a given that there will be helpful people. But sometimes there are families who come [to you] who are like siblings to you, and they can really help you. [...] If you find this kind of family, [...] you can walk together, you can go outside, you can pick your children up from school together or for one another, you can go shopping together. You can really do a lot together. (Interview with Family M1, September 24, 2017)

Although other inter-familial relationships are not necessarily or obligatorily hostile, they are similarly not systematically friendly or seen as intrinsically useful. Shelter living is an environment in which individual needs are varied, trust in outsiders low and communication barriers to understanding high. Lacking a common language, a common culture and a common set of welfare benefits with which to identify with one another, residents often consciously or practically choose to withhold trying to build connections to others within shelters. For example, Mrs. F2, despite her more educated status a teacher in Afghanistan, does not see value in attempting to choose building shelter relationships with others, even other Afghans:

I would say a negative was simply the relationships between people in the home. There were only one or two families from Afghanistan, but with the others, it really was not so easy to get along or get to know them. There was still fighting. So, I always held myself back. (Interview with F2, February 9, 2018)

Family SM, as Syrians in a larger shelter who might presumably be able to form connections with a larger group of people, nonetheless feel their choice to do so would not yield social gains valuable to them:

[The members of Family SM, who have noted previously in the conversation that they do not practice a religion,] have not felt so interested to make friends with others at the shelter. Even though everybody in the family can speak Arabic [along with Kurdish], the son and father explain they don't have an interest to be friends with the Arabs or the Muslims [in the shelter]. Mr. SM says, "Muslims are really a problem for Europe. They are a problem in Syria. [...] Always problems. Do you understand, for Kurdish people, we are a lot like Europeans. [...] With Muslims, they [...] are separate." (Field notes, March 16, 2018)

One sentiment [Mr. SM] shares with me again is that there are many problems here in the shelter. I ask him to clarify what sorts of problems there are. He says, "There are people from many countries; Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran. We cannot speak together. And the Muslims are very different. They wear *hijabs*. The men gawk at women on the streets. They are not like us, so it is difficult to make friends with them" (Field notes, April 27, 2018)

With few ways to engage with or understand one another, shelter residents in the study context spend more energy focusing on their own issues or problems. When asked why refugees do not spend time together to fix their various problems or complaints with shelter living, Mr. W1—an Albanian with a toleration status who has his own unique concerns being wheel-chair bound due to a tumor—explains:

It is really difficult to solve problems together. There are so many different cultures. I cannot really think of a very positive example. [...] There are different kinds of cultures here, and sometimes groups of people do not want to 'mix cultures.' It is easier to understand other Albanians. Not just language, but it is easier to understand them as people. Language is a primary motivation for people to associate with each other. (Interview with W1, August 5, 2017).

Affirming the same drive towards self-preservation, E1, the Cameroonian single mother asylum seeker, notes that individuals may turn to one another for superficial instances of emotional support, but “when things are happier, when there is movement going forward in their lives, they will suddenly keep to themselves” and focus on what they are trying to accomplish (Field notes, April 26, 2018). A3, the single lawyer from Syria with a recognized refugee status, has similar thoughts on needing to expend efforts on one’s own endeavors. “Why don’t Syrians or Afghans want to help each other?” she muses rhetorically. “Well, you have to fight for yourself.” When I ask if anything might be done to encourage more communal action or mutual assistance beyond this, she responds with an emphatic no and says that it would be more useful to direct such support efforts to helping individuals finding their own homes instead, so they might finally have real peace (Interview with A3, March 24, 2018). When few tools exist to move beyond the differences between residents, and individual needs are seen as far more pressing, the choice to engage with others is not necessarily seen as a fruitful application of energy.

In efforts to find ways to build connections amongst residents, but also fulfill their structurally mandated roles to provide avenues for engagement, shelter management and volunteers frequently attempt to facilitate points of support that might encourage interaction of residents, who may not come together organically. These offerings take many forms across many shelters: activity groups for children’s play, museum or city tours, gardening, sewing, men’s and women’s fitness, bike repair, language learning. Enabled within provisioning structures and relied upon as such, shelter management acts as a conduit to host these services and offer structured ways in which refugees can choose to participate in shelter life. The active choice to do so is presumably encouraged. Social workers and volunteers speak frequently of “help through self-help” (*Hilfe, selbst zu helfen*), that is, of wanting to actively encourage refugees to partake in activities so that they might enhance their own lives through developing skills, meeting others, socializing or even just taking their mind off their difficulties for a short while. But it is similarly and frequently described that refugees do not utilize these offerings to the utmost, and sometimes, not at all.

While residents in the study context visit these activities to varying degrees and choose themselves when to do so, their enthusiasm to participate in them often wains when they see them as additional regulated extensions of shelter life. Shelter actors, building their own structures for potential participation, are merely additional points of life management that refugees do not actively design themselves. “Maybe it is just too much,” explains a children’s activity director at an emergency shelter, “such that people do not have a specific desire or interest in the activity that is scheduled. Often, there are so many offerings and schedules here, that maybe people just don’t want this structure in their day” (Field notes, August 7, 2017). In Shelter 2, where the director works, there are more formal sign-ins for coming and going, no facilities for cooking and limited opportunities for external visitors. Life is already governed by queues, meal hours and access cards. But in all shelters, as a social worker underscores, “daily life is already so organized. It can be very regimented,” as the tasks for what must be done in the day—integration courses to attend and where, what government appointments to complete and when, when to come and go—are determined by governing actors and structures, not actively chosen by refugees as ways they might wish to structure their days themselves (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018). “I think they just feel more

comfortable where they are” in their homes, explains the same social worker, because these assigned points of the day compete with what they view as domestic obligations or priorities within their home spaces they can have somewhat more control over.

Where choice can be exerted, it is often put forth where personal domestic preferences can be fulfilled and this regulation of daily life might be somewhat escaped. Directing what available personal time exists towards domestic priorities helps refugees to reproduce, in small ways, the normal orders that are customary, more normal and thus more valuable to them. A Syrian refugee social work assistant explains:

By us [in Syria], adults do not really have hobbies. But here it’s always all hobbies and free time. When my mother was a child, she did something like art or sewing or something. But when she got married, not at all. My father worked all day, my mother cooked all day [...] and my mother worked too. They have no [free] time to enjoy. And that’s a luxurious thing for us, only the rich enjoy it or [...] the people who don’t have the other problems. (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018)

Mrs. H5, a middle-aged married Afghani housewife fighting her family’s asylum denial, explains similarly that daily domestic obligations and familial preferences involve directing free efforts away from communal tasks. There is less desire for communal involvement because the reproduction of familial routines—even in constrained settings—is more highly valued and chosen (Field notes, April 17, 2018).

Even when shelter service offerings are constructed by volunteers or shelter personnel to seem more relevant, residents in the study context still often view them differently, affecting the ways in which they want or choose to participate. A sewing group in Shelter 2, for example, is conceived and run by a volunteer, a self-identified “sewing hobbyist” herself who wants to help women at the shelter find a way to pass the time. She thinks, as she establishes it, that it would be a relevant place for many to gather and meet one another, talking to each other over a shared skill many have grown up with. But, as simply another regulated extension of shelter living, occurring only on days and times convenient to the volunteer, the group ultimately perpetuates similar divisions present in residential relations and time-spending irrelevancies when cast as a community-building opportunity. “When the workshop was newer, there were a few Albanian women also coming,” she explains, “But it seemed they stopped coming when they noticed that many people were speaking Arabic together, and the women felt they couldn’t understand both German and Arabic, so they lost the desire to come” (Field notes, April 7, 2018).

Additionally, as she attempts to lead the women in sewing crafting projects similar to what she herself would undertake as a way to pass free time (such as making cloth totes or other small, simple items), the volunteer remarks that the women “[have] no interest in this” (Field notes, April 7, 2018). Instead, when having access to the sewing machines and time to sew, they prefer to replicate and reproduce their familiar domestic taskings—the making of children’s clothes, bed linens, head coverings and tunics—because it is what they view as relevant. The problem in this case, however, is that the group suffers from a lack of donations and proper equipment to support the makings of these more involved domestic projects that the residents would choose to do. Because it is conceived, supported and run as a community-building craft group by a volunteer with her own vision, the refugees cannot necessarily procure the resources themselves to reconfigure the group to be what they might prefer it to be. Interest falters when relevancy falters, and the activity is another way for living spaces and time to be controlled by others.

As daily living persists in this way, with few means or desires to rectify issues through community action, residents sensibly conceive of shelters as impermanent spaces that they want to leave, not permanent communities they want to substantially improve for the long-term. “Many people have said the shelter is a prison for them, in that it is a holding ground for a long while, but isn’t where they want to stay,” the Syrian refugee social work assistant explains (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018). He summarizes the sentiments of many refugees I speak with, who also make use of prison terms in the sense of feeling a lack of control over what can be extensively changed in shelters.

To choose to apply extensive efforts towards improving shelter life is thus often seen by residents as futile because there is no clear way or reason to overcome divisive components of interpersonal agency or regimented components of shelter governance. The presumed communal spaces of shelters are then not productive places, either to improve or in which to even exist. Shared kitchens barely serve their utilitarian purposes. C3, for example, the single mother asylum seeker from Ghana, says she finds the communal kitchen difficult to use because people leave their dishes in the sink and do not clean up after themselves; the kitchen then smells and is not pleasant to be in, but the shelter management rarely improves the issue (Field notes, November 1, 2017). Fights often ensue when the use or conditions of these spaces cannot be easily navigated between refugees or rectified overall; in Shelter 5, also a large emergency shelter, N1, a young married asylum seeker from Nigeria, describes an instance of an Arabic-speaking resident putting soap in her food while cooking on the communal stove because he did not like the smell; she claims he was hardly punished when she called the shelter security because he denied doing anything and there was difficulty explaining what happened (Interview with AA and N1, October 5, 2017). Similar brawls arise in shared open spaces, when parents have no way to mediate between their children or each other. X1, a single mother asylum seeker from Ghana, explains how she dislikes her son playing in Shelter 2's play area because she frequently sees children beating up on one another, but cannot see any choices in resolution:

The worst part was that the mothers were also sitting right there. I went over to them, I had to say something. I said, well I don't speak German but I still have to try to tell you something. And I tried to gesture and say what I could about why their kids were laughing at E1's son. I tried to ask, and if it were your son? But they just [*she makes a sneering sound with her mouth and nose*] and said, "*Nicht, nicht.* [No, no]" We didn't speak German, so it was hard to say anything. So, a lot of the times the kids are just with us. (Interview with X1, September 1, 2017)

Even areas conceived by shelter management to be communal gardens, possibly peaceful places where residents might be able to exert control over the cultivation of a familiar domestic activity, are in fact similarly contentious spaces, seen frequently as instigators of conflict and promoters of futility. Mrs. H5, from an Afghani family appealing their application denial, for example, explains that the efforts of various residents at Shelter 1 to garden available plots were curtailed when some other residents and children were fighting, with no practice choice to find a resolution:

[When asked if she grew a garden last year,] Mrs. H5 answers, "Not really. Some of us tried, and the plants grew really big. The tomatoes were so big and red. But, then some of the kids came by and ripped the plants out and destroyed them. The neighbors tried to talk to the office, but the office did not do anything about it. The plants were gone." (Field notes April 17, 2018)

In a similar way, two Nigerian women from Shelter 5 (one an asylum seeker and one a fully recognized refugee) question the usefulness of the shelter's gardening space, which they perceive is controlled solely by the shelter management and is thus a presumed waste of their time to attempt to use because they are not the ones who can choose how to use it:

They seem lukewarm. N1 says, "Yes I suppose people can use it, but they have to get the keys."

AA says, "But I think it is really hard to get the keys, I think it is racist against us."

N1 nods and says, "Yes maybe we would like to use it, but they already decided who can use the space and who gets the keys. Some people don't even use their space, but it is decided already. I would have preferred if that area could be a playground for everybody to share because there are so many kids here who would like to run around and play." (Interview with AA and N1, October 5, 2017)

The garden plots, often themselves the victims of their caretakers' impermanence, are physical reminders of the many life possibilities that individuals feel cannot choose to fully tend to or bring to physical fruition. What could be more ironically symbolic of residents' own experiences of upheaval than such garden plots, initially full of hopeful seedlings waiting to push triumphantly through the challenges of earth, only to be suddenly stunted and abandoned when the next uncontrollable (and inevitable) decision from another actor beyond decides yet again there is no real choice to cultivate them? When limited space is exacerbated by limited time, the garden itself becomes divisive, as they wonder why some have access to the plots and others do not, feeling demotivated to choose to use them at all. The sentiments extend to the broad climate of shelter life. Unfortunately, in the study context, no practical way emerges for residents to choose themselves how to communally navigate these issues, take over abandoned areas or manage together the use of shared spaces within the unpredictable time frames residents live at the shelter. As in other domains of refugee life, the reality is that use is decided for them from above, from somewhere beyond their control, imposed as a way they ought to spend their time without consideration for the time potentially views as wasted in doing so. When the ultimate desire is to leave a space for a real home, participants note little incentive to apply choices to work to overcome these conditions, when efforts might be better exerted towards individual advancement, as a social work assistant, himself a refugee, explains:

For example, I want a training position, an internship. If I'm a painter, then I'm [working on] doing an internship in a company, that's way better than making the hallway pretty. This is not my home, this is not my apartment, why should I make it more beautiful, for example? I only stay for a short time. Many think this way. (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018)

Time in the shelter is temporary; even when it is protracted in length, there is always the question of when time there will end, either through a successful home search, at best, or a deportation, at worst. There are few incentives, in this way, for residents to choose to find ways to engage with one another in the overtaking or reaction of a space, especially when living in the space is part of the nightmare one wishes to move beyond. Life in a shelter is not so much starting life (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018) because shelter is merely housing, not home.

7.3.2 Success through institutional intermediaries

Disincentives for choosing to find ways to engage deeply within shelter spaces mean that refugees in the study context often find themselves disempowered to independently move forward towards building a meaningful sense of community or rootedness. As shelter life is regimented through city policies, shelter management organizations and even further the independent interests of volunteers and charity groups, individuals often require connections to intermediaries to help them move beyond the more rigid bounds of shelter living. These specific intermediaries are in positions to help them forge more connections or a greater sense of belonging. They are also better situated to find inroads towards private housing options that might otherwise be difficult to access. In another way, as one political activist explains, change in a variety of sociocultural or individual living capacities often rests on the cooperation of intermediaries who are positioned to address policy barriers directly and find ways around them:

Leader: So, what we do, we try to [work with] the administration and point out the specific policy and say, look here, there are ways, we just have to take advantage of them, right?

Me: So, are the laws the reason for these barriers, then?

Leader: Yes, everything in that regard. Depending on what it is—I say this somewhat sarcastically—if somebody [in charge] does not feel like [implementing] something, it can be found some way in a law to say, see, that won't work. 'Fire code,' for example, is always a nice scapegoat. (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018)

Choice and forward movement without these connection points is often shown to be difficult in the study context. In one way, it comes back to the diversity and complexity of shelter living. When the components of shelter living spaces are inherently divisive and restrictive, residents must possess some connecting tool to mediate through misunderstandings and deficiencies in social, organizational and informational assets, as one engaged volunteer explains:

People from a foreign country come to us, and they do not know each other. They do not know what everyday life is like, what problems there are, which hurdles there are. They do not know the language. This leads to questions and situations, such that offers of help [from volunteers or organizations] arise from them. (Interview with volunteer, local welcome initiative, January 25, 2018)

Like in the legal and economic domains, the connection points for help are those actors better positioned to find and utilize discretionary areas of flexibility. In the sociocultural domain, these are frequently specific shelter workers who act as interaction points between families or volunteers who have taken it upon themselves to become engaged on behalf of the personal and domestic interests of particular families to help them enhance their own choices. These intermediaries are necessary “so that [refugees] keep learning, so that certain milestones happen,” so that certain changes can occur (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018). In that institutional structures depend on shelter staff, TSO personnel and volunteers so heavily in the provisioning of shelter life, governance actors expect these individuals to act as conduits for choice, as opposed to shelter residents themselves in many circumstances of community building, as a social worker emphasizes:

So, we must be able to accompany [the refugees] in a way our institutions expect us to [...]. So, the residents often have a question: can you not do [offer] that and that? As a result, I usually get involved like this: if we cannot handle it ourselves [in the shelter], we'll bring it to the Round Table [of Refugee Issues] and the Round Table will consider, on what basis could one develop such an offer? That is, we orient ourselves first to the need [...] Then, you consider, who can do something like that, well, we do that in the case with other [charity groups] that are made available to us by the city. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018)

Whereas they see direct efforts to engage with each other as less productive and thus choose to avoid them, residents also see relying on social workers and shelter personnel as a more viable choice to potentially address their community- and interpersonal-related difficulties:

Me: Can you think of a time where people worked together or when people together solved a problem?

Mr. M1: No, because everybody here needs help. We could not ever do it alone. There are too many families here, too many lands, too many cultures. We just do not understand each other. We cannot. So, we have to go to the office. We have “mixed heads.” [Because] my head doesn't go together with your head. (Interview with Family M1, September 24, 2017)

Where there is choice for residents, it frequently exists in going to an intermediary social worker, who is in a better position to potentially address an issue, either through elevation towards city complaint channels, imposition of a shelter policy that would regulate everybody or direct retribution to the other party accused of wrong-doing. When asked under what circumstances refugees might come to a social worker within a shelter for assistance, one explains it would likely be “for most issues with daily life” (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 21, 2018). Such channels of resolution may not always be effective, but both residents and shelter personnel frequently see them as the most salient option to drive more potential for fruitful choice under the circumstances of shelter living:

Volunteer coordinator: If the personnel level is right, then a lot is possible. [...]

Me: And how are [the refugees'] voices [for input] heard then, so to speak?

Volunteer coordinator: [...] In every [shelter] institution, there are social workers, they have office hours; they are always there and responsive. So, you have to be active and then go to the social workers and say, one way or another, I need support. Or the social workers also have a sense of which families might not be doing so well, then they consider that there might be a volunteer to be supportive in this case. There are both sides that come together. Of course, it can happen that very quiet, very unobtrusive families do not get involved this way, so one needs to be mindful of not forgetting them. (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018)

With a resident's perspective, Mr. W1, the Albanian man in a wheelchair with a toleration, confirms, "I agree it would be better to try to talk to somebody [another resident] directly, and it would be better to not always have to go through the office [social worker]. But there are eight different cultures here" (Interview with W1, August 5, 2017). X1's experience as a single mother asylum seeker from Ghana is similar, as she describes the impossibility of reconciling with her shelter floor-mates to clean the communal bathroom. She herself does not feel her choice to engage individually with others would be effective, nor does she have absolute confidence in the effectiveness of the social workers either. But at the same time, she sees the social workers as the more viable channel for any possible improvements:

X1: It's a mindset that, because it is not mine, I don't care. It's not my house, so I don't personally need to help.

[...] Me: Do people work together to make a schedule to clean [shared areas]? Or to help each other?

X1: No, it is very difficult because on one floor, only myself and E1 speak English, and the others speak Serbian or Arabic. And people do not really speak German, so it is very difficult to communicate. Maybe the social workers should make a plan that says, people are each in charge of cleaning this room or this area once a week, and maybe it would work better. Or, maybe it would be good to try to have a sign in different languages that instructs on how to use the water closet. Or, the social workers could tell people. (Interview with X1, September 1, 2017)

When there is choice on how to engage in efforts to find homes or communities, residents often prefer to direct those efforts towards engaging with intermediaries who might be able to help them advance towards these ends. Attempting to seek out these empowering connections is a choice many families can and do make, actively assessing their usefulness and value. Family P2, for example, a highly social Syrian family with a recognized refugee status, that enjoys engaging a variety of shelter volunteers and utilizing various forms of offered support, loves visitors, but chooses to dictate the bounds of their engagements with intermediaries when they no longer view the connections as relevant or helpful to their home- and community-related interests. In response to an argument with a specific volunteer over what other volunteers in the shelter his family should or should not engage with, Mr. P2 explains to me how and why he and his family feel they ought to choose who they can engage with to meet their own ends:

Mr. P2: What did you think of her [the volunteer]? She wasn't good, right?

Me (*not knowing what to say*): I didn't really understand what she was feeling on that day [of the argument].

Mr. P2: My wife told me what she said. That you shouldn't come to help us because she was already helping us. That there were too many people helping us. I said, no way. That isn't good. So, I told her, don't come by here anymore. We don't need you. You're not our friend, then.

Me: I understand.

Mr. P2: Not good, right? This is my house. I like to have contact with people. Many people. And I like to make friends. When I have friends, we help each other. If somebody doesn't want to be my friend, doesn't want to help, then they can go. Done. Don't come back. (Field notes, April 29, 2018)

In the study context, refugees frequently make conscious choices on how they might engage with potential intermediaries. Especially as they are encouraged by shelter social workers and even their government case workers to do so in the name of self-betterment, they visit networking cafes, language tutoring sessions and other types of events, especially where there is a high presence of volunteers. When there are large opportunities to meet helpers who might be sympathetic, participating refugees perceive a high value in attending, for example, as does JY, a young Iraqi Yazidi man with a 2-year subsidiary status:

JY says he sometimes visits a refugee café hosted by [a local welcome initiative]. He says he likes the café because he can speak German with some people, try to meet people who can help him later and sometimes ask questions about papers or appointments he has. I ask him if he finds this useful, and he says he definitely does. He also attends some speaking partner programs run by the city library. He likes these because he can also meet different people. (Field notes, April 26, 2018)

But what can also impede the ultimate effectiveness of choice or moving forward among the participants are their observations that the choice to pursue engagement as such does not necessitate an effective intermediary connection. As revealed through the struggles of Mrs. M1, a Kurdish Syrian with four children and a 1-year subsidiary protection status, to make deeper connections to volunteers, despite her choice to apply effort to do so, the availability of connection points is never guaranteed. Similarly, the location, staffing and local amenities of specific shelters often drives what connection points to volunteer resources and involvement might even be available at all, as a TSO volunteer coordinator emphasizes:

In Cologne, every neighborhood is shaped quite differently. So, there are neighborhoods with excellent infrastructure, such that there are so many offers: mothers' groups, networking cafes and meetings, German courses. In [one neighborhood], there are a lot of [social] clubs, [because] there are a lot of young people there and it is where a lot of those people study, so many residents are committed. Then, there are other neighborhoods that are very different, for example [the neighborhood of Shelter 1], there are young people, but no youth center. There is no community center, no civic center, there is nothing. There are just a few isolated social clubs because it is completely different there (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018)

The coordinator goes on to clarify that accessing this avenue of help can be often serendipitous, spontaneous or unasked for, making a realization of refugees' conscious choices or efforts to attempt engagement less possible:

Sometimes that's really how it is, that it's just because the personal chemistry is right. When it happens this way, sometimes incredible things happen. We had a case with a family in an emergency shelter, who so wanted to get out of there. The man was so desperate that he basically approached a pensioner on the street and somehow tried to explain that he couldn't take it any longer, that he needed an apartment for his family, and other such things. They just got along well [laughing], and the man got involved. He found a flat for the family, and now he's somewhat of a replacement grandfather for the family's five-year-old. So, still in contact. Well, that worked just fine. (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018)

The volunteer coordinator acknowledges that it can also often be merely the chemistry of a relationship that determines whether or not there is will to move forward with more substantial material help. In this manner, there is not much recourse for refugees in the study context to ensure they reach these connections; they can merely keep trying to engage, given differing levels of hope or motivation that doing so will result in advancing their goals. For some, like Mr. P2, they choose to continue because they see engagement as a potential opportunity, both for learning and eventual access to something greater:

I ask them if people visit a lot. Mrs. P2 says, “Almost every weekend! We love to have people over.”

Mr. P2 says, “It is good. To learn isn’t just reading, writing. It is speaking. Talking to other people.” [...] They tell me they have had various people help them over time [...] they maintain contact with some of the volunteers and other Germans they know. (Field notes, January 28, 2018)

But for others, like Mrs. M1, they question the value of choosing engagement, when they consistently witness others being helped to find inroads, time after time, but not themselves:

Mrs. M1 asks, “Why doesn’t anybody help me? Why does this café woman [volunteer] get Mrs. G1 all these new things? I asked Mrs. G1, look, can’t you get things from the garbage and wash them? She doesn’t want that. She just waits for the woman at the café to give her everything new. But nobody helps me.” (Field notes, May 3, 2018)

On the way to the bus stop, Mrs. M1 talks to Mrs. A2. She says, “You know, I’ve been coming to this cafe for over a year, and nobody has helped me.”

Mrs. A2 says, “What do you mean? I think the people there are nice.”

Mrs. M1 says, “But look. I always ask for help, and nobody ever helps me.”

Mrs. A2 says, “What do you ask for? What do you want?”

Mrs. M1 says, “Anything. New things. Things for the house. You got all your cabinets through people there.”

[...] Mrs. A2 acknowledges, “That’s hard to get help with. You have to be lucky.” (Field notes, May 9, 2018)

As in other domains, the presence of intermediaries is both helpful and harmful. On the one hand, they are demonstrated avenues for change and interaction that can enhance refugees’ own choices and improve the results and applications of those choices, as a TSO service coordinator points out:

Interaction [...] always rises and falls with the commitment of the individual. Yes, one can have a great possibility for accompaniment, but if one does not push it somehow, step out as motivated and this networking can take place, there might be a great accompanier that stands there, but the doors are closed [on accompaniment]. (Interview with senior volunteer and services coordinator, Diakonie Michaelshoven, January 22, 2018)

On the other hand, they are still gatekeepers in regulating the effectiveness of these choices and can act as another type of contingency towards independence that must be addressed. Especially as shelters are not considered homes or communities, the involvement of intermediaries is especially critical in breaking through in the endeavor to establish a sense of belonging, absent community living, as well as in the search to move on from shelter living and obtain a private residence, a place that can really be one’s own.

7.3.2.1 Seeking a new sense of belonging

In the study context, a theme emerges that some sense of community is necessary to sense belonging and understanding, while combating feelings of isolation. In shelters, residents’ choices on how to direct personal engagements are not necessarily put forth to build connections to other residents because they do not contribute towards community building or feelings of connectedness, unlike connections to Germans or German communities, which can amplify a sense of learning or progress towards feeling more rooted, as participants describe.

But living in a shelter seems to many in the study as a marker of exclusion, a physical reminder of one’s distinction from others who do not. Especially when located in more remote or residential areas, the spaces around shelters do not always offer avenues for fruitful exchanges between the shelter residents and local German neighbors, as A3, the Syrian lawyer with a recognized refugee status, notes:

[In Syria,] people were always outside, always together. You could go out on the street until 9 PM, even 12 midnight and you would see people laughing, eating, drinking, sharing hashish or going to the cinema. Here, there isn't anybody on the street. I wonder where they all are. [...] People are alone in their houses. (Field notes, March 13, 2018)

As such, the study context, refugees are often seeking ways to find these connection points that will limit feelings of exclusion and isolation. An avenue through which to forge them is critical to forming useful networks that can enhance refugees' possibilities for effective choices in moving forward beyond this sense of exclusion, as Family SM, the multi-generational Syrian family with recognized refugee status, describes:

Family SM still feels like they could have more contact with others, especially Germans. The son says he wishes that [the volunteer networking cafe] might be three or four times a month instead of just one. He explains, "We go because it's good to get out of the shelter and try to meet others."

His father says, "Germans are always otherwise at home!" (Field notes, March 16, 2018)

As legal structures dictate in which areas refugees can live, often preventing moving even for family-related reasons (Appendices D and E), connections to already established family or friends from the same country who have immigrated previously cannot reliably provide the same channels towards this connectedness that local intermediaries can. "If refugees have relatives in a certain city," explains a city council member, "These relatives have already built a life and could help with the integration work, but it is somehow completely nonsensical to me that they would be assigned to a [different] municipality with a residence obligation there" (Interview with city council member, The Greens, January 9, 2018).

Instead, there must be an actual, more active entry point into the local community in order to access possibilities for more belonging, as opposed to merely living life cut off and separated within a shelter, removed from wider surroundings. In shelters, where other neighborhood residents and even planned visitors cannot always enter, this physical separation of shelter living highlights the distinction between the residents and the very communities they live in. The role of intermediaries, specifically volunteers, emerges as critical in the study context because these intermediaries are the external community members let into the internal shelter spaces, interfacing between the worlds inside and outside the shelter. In this way, "volunteers have helped build a bridge into this society" (Interview with leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment, February 27, 2018). On the one hand, this deeper integration into actual community participation is a desired goal of refugees. But on the other hand, to reach the goal requires active volunteers who "make it possible to get acquainted again and again [...] to support the steps" necessary to do so (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018).

Without these connections, there appear more limited ways to bridge the gaps between refugee and citizen, between shelter and neighborhood, between sociocultural exclusion and belonging. Residents can live in their surroundings, shielded by shelter fences, but they cannot become fully immersed or socioculturally rooted within them. "There is a lot to learn here. It is more than just language. It is a whole mentality [to learn]," explains a shelter security guard, who is also an Iranian immigrant himself (Interview with shelter security guard, January 26, 2018). The mentality recalls *Ankommen* (Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1), a deeper understanding of how to belong within new sociocultural spaces, build new knowledge about customs and how to move forward with daily living in a new place, echoed by a volunteer who has observed refugees attempting to learn in this regard, but also assisted them in doing so:

Yes, there are some refugees who [are only] glad they're here, that they live safely here and have food and drink, period. Not more. But the vast majority hope for a future. [...] And they definitely want to make a difference, work a bit, really learn something and be with other people. That is all, I think, very, very important, for quite a few. (Interview with volunteer, local welcome initiative, January 25, 2018)

Participants themselves reinforce these sentiments, as they describe that finding how to belong requires extensive processes of learning and deep reconfiguration of their own mindsets about individual culture and place-making that they cannot choose or execute alone. VM, the educated, single Bangladeshi asylum seeker, describes as such his difficulties moving forward into society despite his self-identified high levels of personal motivation, as does Mr. P2, the social Syrian despite his more legally advantageous 3-year fully recognized status:

I still have a feeling I am really not from here, so I have to keep trying really hard in my life every day. Sometimes, for example, I just wish the Germans could really stop and listen to me. [...] Germans really want you to be German. They don't want me to do Bangladeshi things. They want me to do German things. I need to learn the things they do, like waiting at the lights, shopping quickly, using cash. I think it helps to try to be more like the Germans. (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

[I tell Mr. P2], "I learn a lot about your culture when I talk to you."

He says, "But I'm here now. The other culture should go away. I mean, I am in Germany now, so I should take the German culture. My old country [Syria]? It's gone, so it's better that I take the culture from here. What do you think?"

I say, speaking from my perspective also as an immigrant to Germany, "I think it is a balance. [...] A little bit of the old land in the new land."

He shrugs and says, "I am not sure. I have the feeling that I need to take the culture from here. Besides, maybe I don't have a culture. I've lived in so many places." (Field notes, April 29, 2018)

What appears critical to the success of these processes of belonging and understanding is the notion of exchange, which can happen only with intermediaries positioned to assist in the process. "Just this mediation, or this exchange of intercultural competence and each other" is critical to this end because refugees and community members can learn from one another to build the deeper forms of connection and understanding they seek, explains a political activist (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017). The leader of the municipal Foreigners' Authority explains how this might be easier for non-refugee migrants who possess more legal opportunities and fewer operational barriers in their day to day to move freely and choose to pursue these connections more openly. But there is still the emphasis that without such means of connecting more deeply to the community, refugees more generally stand to suffer from an unchosen sociocultural exclusion and a lack of understanding:

I refer to knowledge of society, something like that. There was a strange experience I can recall, a group of Chinese immigrants that visited here [the government office]. We hosted a lecture, then we went to a Carnival museum. Through this, we realized that the group had been living in Cologne around two-and-a-half years, and despite the fact that Cologne Carnival paralyzes the entire city for a week, those in the group hadn't noticed anything of the sort. This actually shows how little those individuals were taken by the hand and could say, 'I am going to be open about my neighborhood, my environment, and actually get to know what the people here are dealing with.' I don't expect that [in the same way] from people who come from a war zone and who actually have such fundamentally different problems, but it would really be important, I think, to still have these integration aids that help to remove [refugees] out of their isolation. They are otherwise always around their peers and it would be nice if they had more to do with people who live here in order to really build up a normal life. (Interview with leader, municipal Foreigners' Authority, January 12, 2018)

With such invested dialog and connection-making, there is perhaps more room for refugees to choose actions to develop a sense of belonging that can go beyond mere language learning or a superficial knowledge of German idiosyncrasies. Instead, there might be a resetting of how "where we come from" can still contribute to new surroundings (Conversation with Farsi translator before interview, April 9, 2018), as

well as greater enrichment of understanding in what it really means to belong in new surroundings. By enhancing the capacity for seeking out and finding these means of connecting, refugees might find more ways out of shelter lives of exclusion and avoid social isolation.

7.3.2.2 *Finding private homes*

Additionally, as moving forward encompasses enhancing a sense of belonging, leaving shelter living enhances this possibility as a salient theme within the study context. In a private home, there are greater chances to choose how to apply social assets of connection that might be more freely cultivated, as a social worker explains:

The difference between [a private home and] the shelter is, in a home, there may be visitors. There they can receive people, actual social help. This means the overall social-educational support and help for a family can be active there. It's completely different than in a shelter. It means that the family can get far more active and personal support than in a shelter. And that's actually more of the benefit. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, March 7, 2018)

Although intermediary connections may be better cultivated from outside shelter spaces in that private homes simply offer more freedoms to structure domestic lives and preferences, for the shelter residents in the study context, they are, ironically, frequently critical in moving out of shelter spaces to begin with. Understandably as such, the difficulties searching for one's own place to live are a frequent complaint of families, as they echo what is reported by city administrators; there is simply limited housing available in the city, and what is available, is difficult to come by for families with poor language skills to apply, less cash on hand for large deposits and less stable prospects to remain long term:

Is it really possible to have a normal flat? And there are far too few in Cologne. But not only since the refugees arrived. [This] was a problem for years. But, of course, now this situation makes this lack of affordable housing especially noticeable, right? [...] Less and less affordable housing has been built, and the number is decreasing every year instead of becoming significantly more [to meet the need]. (Interview with volunteer leader, local welcome initiative, March 9, 2018)

Mrs. M1, a Kurdish Syrian with a 1-year subsidiary status, often reflects on how others from her shelter have managed to overcome these issues with assistance to move out. She explains, "These other women from the shelter, Mrs. F2 and Mrs. A2? The other volunteers have helped them to get all new things. Do you know, everything in their kitchens is new? Their apartments are new?" (Field notes, May 5, 2018).

Mrs. F2 and Mrs. A2 (both Afghani women with subsidiary statuses) confirm the role of key intermediaries in their life, in their cases, volunteers whom they both heavily credit in enhancing their actions and choices forward towards obtaining a private residence. In their interview, Mr. and Mrs. A2 explain that a volunteer from the women's cafe essentially took the family under her wing, searched for apartments on their behalf and helped them with the application in German, writing letters to the landlord and clarifying steps to complete administrative requirements with the Job Center (Interview with Family A2, April 9, 2018). At the same time, another volunteer, a medical doctor who had also been helping Mr. and Mrs. A2 with German tutoring and free psychological counseling, connected them with a German family getting rid of a kitchen and other household furniture items. Of course, the family would choose separately to move from the shelter, but they require the assistance of intermediaries to execute effectively.

Similarly, engaged volunteers have helped recognized refugee Family SM in their ongoing search for an apartment, investing time to help them find listings and speak better to landlords. Mr. SM's son explains how these volunteers have also gone on apartment tours with them to help better represent their interests and better understand the rental situations, similarly enhancing the family's capacity for effective choice:

[Other volunteers] helped me to write some information about myself that I can practice saying or that I can use to help apply for an apartment. [...] When we had some questions about apartments we found, these women helped us to understand if the apartments were good or not.” (Field notes, March 6, 2018)

A few weeks later, I meet Family SM again, along with one of the mentioned volunteers helping with their apartment search. She describes how she once convinced the family to avoid renting from a potentially nefarious landlord, who “would have gladly given them the apartment.” The construction of the apartment was strange, such that she felt it may have been renovated against building codes and was being rented illicitly as a residence (Field notes, May 2, 2018). In this case, Family SM chooses to value the help and input of the volunteer over being in a private house at all, suggesting how intermediaries have much power to shape choice and drive it in specific directions, sometimes more than refugees alone.

Mrs. F2 similarly acknowledges the importance and necessity of an intermediary connection in finding her family’s apartment, as well as many household items they were able to accumulate. But she also underscores the serendipity of the relationship, that she feels access to this connection point was more through luck as opposed to her own conscious choice, a theme mentioned in prior sections:

We were able to put in an application for help with household goods through a city government program. This program gathered donations through German families and was able to distribute items to us in this way. So, help has really come a lot from German families. It was that way with the apartment also. It came also through a German family. It was actually a family that my husband met through his work at the cleaning firm. He was doing a job for them, and he wasn’t feeling so well one day on site. He was nervous, anxious, just feeling a little sick. The family asked him about it. [...] And he said, I have a lot of worry about my wife. She is sick and unhappy. He told them a little more about our story. And it seemed that no sooner had he told them about it, that they put us in touch with the landlords of this new building and almost immediately, we had been connected to this apartment. It happened quite fast. Another German colleague of my husband’s has also been very helpful to us in suggesting where we could purchase cheaper furniture or get some donated or used items for the house. (Interview with F2, February 9, 2018)

Mrs. M1, the Kurdish Syrian housewife with subsidiary status, reflects on seeing other residents move out with the help of their volunteer connections. It is not that building a household is impossible without external help; merely that the choice to execute might be expedited or more likely with it:

[Mrs. M1] tells me that she recently spoke with Mrs. G1 [another refugee from the shelter] at [language] school. Mrs. G1 was saying how one of the [volunteer] women from the [networking] cafe has recently helped her to get a lot of new things for the shelter apartment. Mrs. M1 asks me rhetorically, “Why doesn’t anybody help me? Why does this cafe woman get Mrs. G1 all these new things? I asked Mrs. G1, look, can’t you get things from the garbage and wash them like I do? But she doesn’t want that. She just has the woman at the cafe to give her everything new. But nobody helps me. It all comes slowly.” (Field notes, May 3, 2018).

Ultimately, elements of both agency and opportunity structure limit how refugees engage with their shelter spaces and those within it. In the study context, choices in bottom-up community building are constrained when it is difficult to reliably interface with one another to work towards shared visions of improvement. Where they are able, refugees instead often direct their efforts towards engaging with the types of intermediaries who are better positioned to facilitate choices and reaching more individually focused home and community goals on their behalf. Without these connections to engaged intermediaries—to volunteers and shelter personnel in particular—refugees feel that their choices put forth towards finding community and belonging may be difficult to execute and realize. Similarly, as in other domains, they recognize that connections give them access to opportunities they would not have had otherwise to connect to others around them and possibly build real homes; as such, they appear a critical link towards moving closer to stability, security and independence.

7.3.3 Hope within the microsphere of domesticity

In the study context, focusing less on pursuing empowered community-building with shelters with other refugees, refugees instead put forth energy to execute choices as they pertain to more individual pursuits, such as structuring their own domestic values and family living. Empowerment in personal and familial life goes beyond seeking to avoid suffering from objectively poor building conditions such as bad hygiene or a lack of privacy. Despite the nature of flight, “one does not completely lose one’s origin, that is, language, culture and religion, if one is uprooted from that environment” (Interview with manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department, November 17, 2017). Whereas they are more constrained in areas of community building, individual elements of empowerment within the sociocultural domain emerge in the study context in that refugees are finding ways to actively choose to make their living spaces more familiar when they are able to, as well as prioritize maintaining individual values and culturally significant practices within them, even if these strategies are basic or rudimentary under certain shelter living conditions.

7.3.3.1 Using items of home-making

Even before their accommodations have been upgraded to newer or more comfortable apartment-style shelters, attempting control and choice over an individual space is an ongoing sentiment held by all refugee families I meet. As such, they all attempt to apply the assets they have within their regulated shelter environments towards improving their current living spaces in individual ways to build some elements of homemaking—even if they are frequently quite limited—seeking ways to control pieces of home life that are familiar to them. What discretion there is to pursue, find or purchase familiar items acts as a coping mechanism to ease the pain of lacking home, even in emergency contexts where there is little flexibility or ability to possess a private or personal space. Family H1, Kurdish Syrians with two children and a 1-year subsidiary status, describe this feeling:

In fact, one time, when we were in the emergency shelter in Porz, we had such a desire to make *dolmas* [stuffed vegetables], to remember our homeland. We bought all the ingredients. We were absolutely going to do it. So, we went out into a park where it was quiet and we could be alone together and enjoy. We brought a camping stove, and we just cooked this anyway. We ate some and brought some back. We just had to do it. (Interview with Family H1, November 21, 2017)

When there is even some minimal permissive flexibility to do so, participants frequently find small ways to make their shelter spaces more home-like, even though their ultimate goal is a private and real home of their own and home-making items can be impractical to accumulate en masse. Especially when these activities are not explicitly prohibited or punished through fines or regular shelter patrol, there are physical rearrangements of space, for example, to be more like what is familiar, as I observe during field visits and many conversations within shelter spaces. Issued bunks are disassembled so that mattresses can be laid on the floor, bedecked with pillows and pushed against walls for communal sitting and eating. Rugs with oriental-style prints mark areas for living and gathering. Curtains or sheets section off other areas for food preparation, baby care or sleep. Even in shelters with more rigid regulations, there are small acts of control inserted in forms of neatly arranging shoes outside rooms, portioning off bunk beds with sheets for privacy or illicitly using small electrical appliances like rice cookers or single burners that can be easily rehidden or repurchased if confiscated.

Little by little, there is also a slow accumulation of some limited amount of household goods that piece together what is required to eventually make a home. From flea markets, one-Euro stores and shops in ethnic neighborhoods and occasionally gathered from charity closets, refugees use small discretionary funds to purchase such goods like specialized cooking ingredients (like spices, dried fish and specific vegetables or grains), cooking implements for specific dishes (like special bread makers for flat bread, shaping molds for

falafel and pressure cookers for rice) and hobby items (like cable boxes to access foreign-language television and hookah pipes). While this is not necessarily possible in emergency or temporary shelters in which space is at a premium, sleeping facilities are shared or rudimentary and cooking is not permitted, it is more common that participants choose to seek out these items when their shelter spaces are more private and somewhat more stable, or at least present fewer regulations governing the practice of daily routines. When they wish to acquire larger furniture items, they often seek out free sources such as charity closets or even communal trash heaps so that the items can be easily abandoned in the event of further moves.

In no shelter space I see is this application of home items more apparent than in the shelter apartment of Family T2, a Roma family with 9 children and a toleration status who had been living there for at least 4 years. "I like it this way," Mrs. T2 tells me over breakfast one morning, "that my husband and son could help [decorate] it all for us. I feel better with it this way" (Field notes, March 2, 2018). Family T2's shelter space is personalized with as many functional and decorative items of a household as they are able to afford, having collected them over the years of their toleration status from discount sales at a large big-box store, flea markets and charity sales:

Their space is unlike any of the others I have visited. It is richly decorated, quite literally from top to bottom. All the walls are covered with different kinds of printed vinyl and wallpaper. Some have the texture of faux stone or tile. Others are patterned with fleur-de-lis or paisley prints; many are accented with metallic paper or foil. All the floors have also been covered with rugs, flat commercial carpet tiles or linoleum. Mrs. T2 explains that she doesn't want the floors to get scratched, aside from the fact that they look better when they are covered. The space has multiple bedrooms, and each has its own unique floor and wall coverings. Her daughters' bedroom has a pink 'Hello Kitty' carpet and pink wallpaper with Disney princesses on it. Her oldest three sons share the next room, which has its own carpet and wallpaper that has graffiti print on it. Then, there is a main open space, where the family has installed their own kitchen. There are two fridges (a small and a large, the issued ones which I recognize from the shelter), but then they have replaced some the issued equipment with their own row of blue laminate cabinets and a butcher block style counter. [...] In the middle of this space, they have a table with two-sided banquette seating and four more chairs. The table itself is glass and has a vinyl sticker top with a black and gold rose print covering it. The tops of the kitchen cabinets are decorated with fake plants, ceramic decorations, colored glass bottles, candles and also religious statues. There is other Catholic religious iconography hung on the walls, along with many statues of Our Lady and other statues of the Sacred Heart that are placed on their own shelves.

Around the corner from the open kitchen there are three other rooms. They have a room they call the salon, which has a printed table that matches the dining room table, two couches and a larger TV. I see a bathroom (which they have also covered with vinyl wallpaper to look like stone tiles). One is a bedroom with a large bed where she and her husband sleep. It has more rugs and religious iconography on the walls. The final bedroom is for her other sons and has most of the children's toys. It is the first shelter apartment I have seen that a family has really made their own. Mrs. T2 knows this, it seems. She is proud of the space, which she tells me she enjoys showing to those who come by. "I've seen others' places," she says, "And they don't do anything to them! I can't stand the white walls." (Field notes, March 2, 2018)

But despite what control over living space can be had, what could be done on the surface, or what household goods and items might ease the feelings superficially, fuller empowerment in the form of choice bringing about a desired end is ultimately curtailed, namely because the psychological pain of being housed without a home is consistently clear. In the study context, individuals seek private homes and goods to fill them with because they represent a fundamental way to have more ownership over the structure of one's private life. Even despite the decorations, the amount of personalization that was probably the most extensive to be found in a shelter, the cumulative discretionary funds that had spent over years, Mrs. T2 still could not see her shelter space as her own home because it simply was not:

Despite being able to do what they have with the space, she says, “Ideally, I would like my own apartment because then, you can really feel at ease. You can really feel like a place is yours.” (Field notes, March 2, 2018)

She would not say she were fully empowered in this way, since her family’s choices to decorate did not bring about the ultimate desired end of having a real home. Although the control of domestic spaces offers empowerment in the form of executing choice when permitted, fully empowered home life goes beyond the ability or choice to possess mere objects in a well-maintained space. As a group of shelter volunteers discuss components of shelter living, they illustrate that the very nature of shelter living—the combination of limiting factors of agency within a highly regulated environment of living—does not seem to bring about a fully empowered domestic life because fundamental components of it are missing:

[The social worker] explains that some of the families have moved already, to include Family M1, who “moved to the most loved home [shelter] in Cologne.” She says, “It has so much to offer; video cameras, 24-hour security, it is brand new. Everyone wants to be there.” I overhear a couple of the volunteers quatsching a little bit about the location; one says, but is there enough space there to sit outside? Is there a good playground? Another says, if there is 24-hour security, do residents and visitors always have to register there? What if I don’t know how long I will stay? (Field notes, November 6, 2017)

In shelter life, there are choices to structuring daily living that simply don’t exist, even if a shelter is in physically good condition with some specific beneficial or provisional qualities. There is limited choice to determine who might visit and when, how children might play or even how one might exist without so many permissions or oversights. As such, fuller empowerment comes with having a home to fully control, regaining groundedness that has been absent in flight. To achieve the experience of physical and mental peace through controlling the place of home is to have finally found a place from which life can begin, as Mrs. F2, the Afghani former teacher with a 1-year subsidiary status explains, after moving into an apartment with her husband and children and reflecting on what she likes better now that she is out of the shelter:

The most important thing is that I have finally found some quiet and peace, after two-and-a-half years of what I have seen and what I have been through. I can finally say, ‘I know where I am. This is my house. (Interview with F2, February 9, 2018)

In the study context, when refugees can find and make a true home, their empowerment in living choices reveals both a material and psychological achievement. But as Family D1, two adult children from Albania living with their widowed mother and toleration statuses, explains, the very “idea of a home” signifies the first part of the journey towards somewhere has been completed (Interview with Family D1, November 26, 2017). As such, even when the execution in shelter spaces is incomplete and imperfect, the drive towards this goal compels the forms of homemaking that are attempted; even when choices to outfit shelter spaces do not create the fullness of a private home, they nonetheless offer some way to execute domestic choices and move towards this end, building a space of one’s own to serve as “areas where they can find peace” (Interview with city council member, The Greens, January 9, 2018).

7.3.3.2 Maintaining domestic and cultural rituals

In similar ways to using items of homemaking, empowerment in the study context exists in refugees’ choosing to maintain personal values and customs. Although in some instances, the execution of daily routines “may be[merely] comfortable, but rarely confer new or higher levels” of choice (Alsop et al., 2006 p. 14), such practices in the context of highly regulated shelter living can in fact demonstrate choice by ways of consciously inserting meaningful personal values into otherwise highly suppressive living constructs. “The less I can decide for myself, the more of an alienated other I am,” explains a division leader within the

municipal Housing Office, regarding the psychologically and positionally detrimental effects of regulated shelter life (Interview with division leader, municipal Housing Office, October 30, 2017). When living conditions afford little privacy, little ability to prepare meaningful foods, little capacity to simply “come to rest” alone, individuals become wholly “determined by others” (Interview with city council member, The Greens, January 9, 2018). As such, the conscious insertion of personal and cultural preferences within such structures often means actively being able to reclaim parts of being determined by others. It thus demonstrates the ability to consciously choose constructs for daily living that advanced desired ends because they are deliberately pursued, personally meaningful overlays on living conditions that are otherwise highly impersonal.

Finding and choosing ways to maintain meaningful living practices can be motivating and psychologically fulfilling to participating refugees in a variety of ways. In one way, when they can choose how to support familial and culturally significant practices in ways that are fruitful to them, they can feel a greater sense of individual responsibility and leadership within the domestic sphere. This is particularly the case when material needs are lacking and adherence to custom can be seen as a marker for something they can positively control (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 26, 2018). In another way, the empowered execution of cultural and familial preferences can represent elements of holistic social integration in that the execution of different domestic roles, practices and methods of living relate to self-sufficiency and confidence to provide for one’s family, as a city council member explains:

It leads to self-reliance when the family can be together. That is a priority. The necessity of familial role-playing is related to this. This only happens when individuals can cook for themselves, can work as men or women, so that they can show the children that they are doing this and that now, that they are providers, [...] role models. (Interview with city council member, The Left, January 8, 2018)

As such, even as refugees in the study context embrace the need for change to find ways to accommodate within their new German society, they devote much individual energy and resource availability to exerting what choice they can over the dynamics of their personal domestic lives. Especially in areas inherent to a very sense of individualism, these efforts are intuitive and strong. One clear example of such a choice reaching desired ends towards individual fulfillment is continuing to speak native languages at home, if not explicitly offering instruction to children. According to many participants, language choices at home preserve broader connections to heritage and culture, but also help parents keep bonds with their children, who may increasingly begin to identify more with surrounding German mores as their language skills develop more quickly (Field notes, conversation with Red Cross shelter volunteer, December 13, 2017). The adherence to religious practices for those who value them is another example of choices to refuse to capitulate to the often-impractical conditions of shelter life and barriers to practice, in order to maintain an inherent sense of self. As I note through various conversations and observations, religious refugees, for example, take long-haul public transportation journeys to houses of worship from their isolated shelters, practice ongoing adherence to standards of modest dress even in open gymnasiums, routinely refuse shelter-catered food not in line with religious dietary preferences and ritually clean themselves in rudimentary communal restroom facilities. Denigrating or ignoring such practices might be easier in practicality, but maintaining them sustains internal fulfillment that can maintain familiarity and comfort.

In similar ways, the choices of how to collect and cook food, when the ability exists, are frequently ways for participants to find comfort, remember their homes and feel properly nourished. Mrs. M1, for example, whom I visit frequently over tea and meals within two shelters where she lives, often tells me that it is important for her to cook Syrian food at home so her two younger children remember what comes from their homeland. She is often frustrated when she says her youngest, kindergarten-aged son prefers German rolls with meat and cheese (*Brötchen*) to the flatbreads, spiced roast chickens, yogurt and mixed vegetable salads she tries to prepare in her shelter kitchen. E1 the single mother asylum seeker from Cameroon, tells

me similarly that she is happy to use more of her limited allowances to purchase yams, dried fish and tomato products from a specialty African shop so her children can get used to eating food from Cameroon and not just German sweets or noodles (Field notes, February 8, 2018). For Mr. and Mrs. SM—the former of whom owned restaurants in Syria and the latter of whom ran a large, multi-generational interfamilial household—utilizing their resources to prepare elaborate meals in their communal container kitchen is a way to experience some of the productivity they once had and intimately valued (Field notes, April 27, 2018). Even when no ability to cook or permission to store food exists in a shelter, I consistently observe small means of purchasing subterfuge in line with preferences of food consumptions; boxes of tea, instant puddings, dried fish snacks, sweets and small candies, packs of flat bread that are familiar brands, contraband from the perspective of shelter rules, but reminders of home and what is known from the perspectives of the refugees hiding them amongst their limited possessions. For P3, a young, single mother asylum seeker from Nigeria, pregnant much of the time while living in an emergency shelter where no cooking or food storage was permitted, choosing ways to possess these small familiar food items made her feel healthier and more nourished (Interview with C3 and P1, September 18, 2017).

The practice of meaningful holiday and life celebrations also find high priority in the study context, despite the basic conditions of living observed across shelters. Residents' choosing to partake in meaningful celebrations offers regularity, hope and levity to what often feels like a daily cadence of uncertainty and monotony. Celebrations are ways that refugees can choose to find joy both in their living spaces, but also with one another. For example, activity rooms in shelters are often reserved for children's birthday parties, in which many shelter families are invited to share lavishly prepared food and sweets. Shelter management often hosts yearly summer grill parties, in which residents willingly contribute dishes and music. Yearly shelter Christmas or Carnival parties function similarly, where large potlucks, children's activities and holiday music from various cultures are shared communally and happily. Islamic Eid brings a chance to gather communally and prioritize cooking and giving, not only with Muslim residents celebrating together, but also with them reaching out to the shelter staff and other residents to share traditions, as I learn:

I find out from [the shelter social workers] that there is actually a celebration going on for Eid today instead of German lessons. [...] In their office, there have been many plates of sweets brought to them, many homemade, such as baklava, candies and some biscuits filled with date paste. The social workers tell me that many people were up late last night celebrating the holiday together. (Field notes, June 26, 2017)

Such celebrations offer a rare channel in which shelter residents might have a way to learn from and have fun one another. The rituals of celebrating together are “not just drinking a coffee or baking a cake,” explains a professional Farsi translator. “But under these activities is the culture, the underlying discussion. This is an orientation with the society [...] a clarification through a common language” of sharing the rituals of food, religion, music and life events together (Interview with professional translator, March 26, 2018). One Syrian fully recognized refugee, also working as a social work assistant in a large emergency shelter (Shelter 2), discusses how this type of sharing is a valuable way to promote some productive social gathering in a shelter space. He acutely understands that refugees “would rather sit in the room with a few [others] and have coffee than go to a service and not understand a word” or point of why it existed (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018). Skeptical of these more tightly controlled events and offerings that may exist more to further the personal or organizational interests of volunteers and shelter personnel, he notes instead that gatherings over food, rituals and celebrations can provide a more organic way to get to know one another in everyday ways. More deeply, sharing such activities can help build solidarity through the mutual and conscious acknowledgment of tradition:

Recently I organized a celebration of Eid [for the residents] with my colleague. This year we are celebrating Nowruz [Persian New Year]. That was my idea, I suggested it, and it worked great. Super great. Everyone was so happy. And everyone was really integrated. Afghans with Iranians, with Kurds, with Serbs, with people who are Christian. [...] I think such events are really cool too. [...] We're celebrating. And [we're seeing], that's their culture, and I have respect for it and my culture too [...]. Or, for Carnival we all did some crafts together. I find such things really interesting. Because, instead of something that has no use, being with one another and [building] solidarity [is] much better than say, just offering [material] charity and accepting it. (Interview with EC, refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie, March 5, 2018)

Finding ways to advance these practices within the context of shelter life reveals the strength of choice in prioritizing personally meaningful and inherent values. In no other example during my fieldwork is this more apparent than the lavish engagement party hosted by Family SM for their daughter from the humble trappings of their shipping container in Shelter 4. Within the setting of the unfamiliar, but acting within the bounds of what is permitted in the shelter space, the family chooses actively not only to engage in what is familiar, but to holistically prioritize the celebration of a pinnacle life moment in their culture:

I visit Family SM for their daughter's engagement party. [...] From my impressions of attending, the family has made a commitment to celebrate the occasion rightfully within the limits of what they can reach given the circumstances.

My initial thought walking into their container is, this is a party! There are probably at least 25 people there, aging from young babies (including the parents' newest grandchild from another city), to toddlers to young-20s friends and relatives to middle aged friends, aunts and uncles and even (as far as I understand) the groom's elderly (70+) mother. The family has put a curtain over the main door way, and the living area of the container is full of people sitting on all the mats the family has, which they have lined along the sides of the container. I come in and greet Mr. SM's son and the other guests who are there with a handshake. I don't realize it as I am saying hello to everybody, but the men and women have been separated by the tiny areas in the container. [...] I find this curious, as there has never been the pretense before (of separating by sex) at other occasions of dining with them, and the family is always keen to point out (in past circumstances meeting them) that they don't follow a religion and they find Islamic traditions [from Syria] particularly unseemly. But, as with many things cultural, standards of gendered behavior and general locale-driven expectations and norms blend together to create customs and practices that people abide by regardless, even in this shelter setting.

In the women's area, I see Mr. SM's daughter, for whom the party is being held. She has a full face of makeup, high heels and a western-style red party dress that reminds me a little bit of a short prom dress. The other women are dressed in a combination of jeans/sweaters, drapery pants and tops and a few are wearing fancy summer dresses. [...]

In terms of the party itself, it feels utterly lavish, even living circumstances aside. The parents have prepared food for all the guests. There are plates of fried potatoes and French fries, salads made of tomatoes, cucumbers and herbs, piles of bread, plates of yogurt, plates of raw vegetable garnishes (green onions, radishes), bowls of tomato soup with beans and beef, rice with shredded chicken and spiced roast chicken wings, covering the entire floor of the space. Despite the number of people present, they do not consume all the food that is set out because there is so much. For dessert, there are plates full of fruit (bananas, apples, oranges) and four types of boxed baklava. There is tea and coffee offered. Table cloths are spread out in the middle of the container, and everybody is seated around the perimeter. Some people spill into the other section of the container, and there are more plates and table cloths set up there also.

After eating, the women only conduct an engagement ceremony. The family's daughter and her fiancé sit at a table, which is placed on the elevated platform of the container in front of the window. There is Kurdish music playing. The women dance to the music and take turns bringing cash up to the table. Some of the women are not refugees, others are, but they all leave 50 Euro notes on the table. Finally, Mrs. SM takes out a bag of jewelry from a proper jewelry store in one of the (primarily) Turkish neighborhoods in Cologne. The bag contains multiple boxes of jewelry to include gold rings, a man's chain necklace, women's chain necklaces, some with medallions, earrings and bracelets. At first, I wonder if the gold might be artificial, but upon looking up the jeweler's name later, I gather it is likely real. (Field notes, May 5, 2018)

Despite the cramped quarters and limited funds, a lavish dinner is planned for, cooked and hosted from within the shared container space. Despite the visiting hours restrictions, guests still come and leave as necessary. Despite the noise ordinances, music is still played within reason. Working together to provide the material pieces, the entire family is able to prioritize an important milestone and at least some of the cultural expectations coming along with it. A life ritual is actively chosen, prioritized and carried out within the confines of restricted shelter living.

In a general sense, as experts often discuss, refugees, like any others, have the fundamental desire to become more comfortable, little by little, within their living spaces (Interview with lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives, November 24, 2017). As such, they choose and prioritize the individual ways they can find to reach these ends within their immediate sphere of domestic control. Ultimately, it is an active contribution in the processes of coping, but also moving on in the sense of regaining the normalcy of everyday experiences. “The question of normality is very important, to become normal as soon as possible,” explains a Red Cross leader of refugee services (Interview with leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross, December 5, 2017). Especially in the context of flight and arrival, finding ways to explore the insertion and invention of everyday values and practices within new orders emerges as a way to discovering how to feel more at ease, more familiarized, more at home in another place.

Summary

As in other domains, the desire to move beyond subsistence and establish more meaningful ways of living is a central theme in the domestic, communal, familial and cultural goals of refugees in the study context. As Family SM’s story at the chapter’s beginning highlights, the expansion of sociocultural life goes beyond simply being grateful to avoid starvation or homelessness. It is not enough merely to have food, but rather, one strives to make and enrich food, create memory-rich meals and enact important rituals. It is not enough to merely be sheltered from the elements, but rather, one strives to construct a unique space of one’s own, find comfortable trappings within and build a real home. It is not enough to merely be safe from the violence of the past, but rather, one strives to find the psychological peace derived from personal space, privacy and autonomy within domestic and community spheres of living. Family SM attempts to meet these ends through engaging familial and intermediary networks, the latter of which become particularly useful for them in bridging multiple, intersecting challenges. Their connections to volunteers not only represent a way to host and entertain visitors to replicate important elements of home and sociocultural life, but also as channels for skills learning, house hunting and acculturation to life in Germany. Even so, the family—like others in the study context—is still burdened by the rules and constraining cadences of shelter living, which they continuously aspire to leave with great practical difficulty.

As this chapter has examined, the family’s intersecting struggles are not unique. For the refugee migrants in Cologne, shelters remain the dominant area of refugee living, and the general conditions of life there affect physical and interpersonal components of agency. Shelters are crude, temporary spaces that can be dirty, crowded and contentious. Interpersonally, the diversity in language, culture, religion, legal status, educational background and ethnicity mean that it is difficult for refugees to interact with one another, leading to knowledge shortfalls and misunderstandings. These physical and interpersonal qualities of shelter living affect agency with regards to material, physiological, psychological, social and informational assets in attempting to establish domestic life and find a sense of community within a new place. The governmental institutional structures influencing this presentation of agency are also complex, spread across multiple layers of governance that create layers of regulation that limit adaptability in implementation. Although shelter is provided to avoid destitution, issues of quality control, instability and over-regulation have been the result of resource management difficulties in needing to provide shelter for large numbers of individuals within a constrained urban housing market and time period. As such, the system is inherently quite closed to possibilities for bottom-up interaction and change.

Ultimately, in the sociocultural domain, these elements of asset composition and opportunity structure mean that refugees in the study context often have difficulty reaching their goals for more empowered sociocultural domestic and community living. This reconciliation is challenging, because the diversity in shelter living means that refugees often have difficulties engaging productively with one another. At the same time, the complexity and heavily regulated nature of shelter existence leave few entry points to incentivize and choose productive engagement. The result is that it is difficult for refugees to find ways to meaningfully interact with one another and address problems of living through their own collectively chosen solutions. By extension, choice is often exerted towards more individualized advancement to leave shelters, which are not considered homes or spaces of place-making. As in other domains, there is a high need for the reliance on other intermediary actors, often volunteers or shelter personnel, who are positioned to work around the difficulties of refugee-to-refugee interaction and more directly interact with opportunity structures to assist in circumventing barriers towards advancing the desired choices of sociocultural life. One social worker is keenly aware of this positioning, understanding that empowerment for change frequently rests on her ability to mediate on behalf of refugees and their sociocultural challenges:

My most important tasks are two-fold: first, that life with one another [in the shelter] runs undisturbed, that [residents] get along with each other, and second, that they [refugees] really get a chance here in society to arrive in it. (Interview with social worker, Red Cross, January 23, 2018)

Although they are frequently grateful for the help and guidance, along with having somewhere to be sheltered, refugees in the study context are also aware of the feeling of being always determined by others so frequently in their daily existence. E1, the single mother asylum seeker from Cameroon, explains that she sometimes feels like a prisoner simply because she does not like to be controlled in every such way; being told what and when to eat via a cafeteria-style service line with a punch card, who she can visit with and when, when and where she can enter certain spaces, what she can and cannot do to use communal shelter equipment to care for shelter room (Field notes, August 2, 2017). As in other domains, refugees in the study context have not necessarily been met with sociocultural elements of complete destitution, but rather, have been forced to contend with the protracted extension of control in many elements of their individual and communal ways of living. The struggle does not rest in overcoming a lack of shelter needed for survival. Rather, it is facing the lack of holistic ability to choose and find productive ways to move forward interacting with others, building an established home life and finding a place within a new community.

At the same time, refugees find ways to use what is around them to prioritize family values and some cultural elements of home life. They choose to cook and buy what they can, speak their languages, practice their religion and celebrate holidays. They decorate when they are able and slowly collect items of homemaking. Amid government appointments, language classes and orientation within new spaces, they strive to find ways back towards the daily cadences that are familiar to them. In these ways, they reveal the power they seek and have to combat turbulence with culturally meaningful elements of normalcy.

In this way, when asked directly about how shelter spaces might be improved towards more choice-driven ends, experts and municipal actors seem to agree that the solution does not rest with exclusively separating refugees by type or demographic, to limit struggles of identifying with one another in shelter spaces. Many emphasize the need to learn how to coexist in a multicultural diverse environment more general as a component of community familiarization. But simultaneously, there is an understanding of the value in housing stability and privacy and a consensus that better solutions would move refugees generally towards these ends, in which more incentivized choices to root within local places might actually be encouraged. When they can do so, most often within the confines of private homes or apartments they've managed to reach, they may find deeper comfort. "Here, in a home," explains Mrs. F2, the Afghani former teacher with a 1-year subsidiary status after living in shelters for almost three years, "There is finally peace" (Interview with Family F2, February 9, 2018).

8. Conclusion

Finding a way forward: VM, a young, single, educated Bangladeshi man with an open asylum case

From the perspective of some government measures, VM might be looked at as an integration “success story.” He has a bachelor’s degree in accounting from Bangladesh, but, given that he is under 25, is still young enough to be subsumed into a re-training program with an IT service firm. He speaks fluent English and passes a B1 German exam via his own initiative to study and engage volunteer tutors, as he has not been able to receive a slot to participate in an integration course, coming from country with a lower probability to receive a positive asylum decision. He even tries to be a community organizer for other Bangladeshi refugees in his shelter in the same situation, attempting to host his own tutoring groups for them so he might help their German learning with instruction in Bengali.

As many of his insights shared throughout the manuscript suggest, VM certainly possesses higher levels of agency in the form of education and language knowledge, a position in a training program, motivation to try to navigate bureaucracy and a penchant for building social connections to both other refugees and Germans. But despite these advantages, he still encounters structural difficulties applying these resources to meet the ends he desires across various areas of his life. His experiences, which might seem on the surface to be one of a more empowered or integrated way forward, reveal impediments to his own choices upon deeper examination, as he explains when I ask him how in control he feels of his own life:

I would say about 20% in control. [...] I have no control of my living. I have no real privacy. Even with my job [in IT], I didn’t really have much choice in that. I would have preferred to [re]do my bachelor’s in accounting or to have that [an accounting] job. I have to live in this shelter. I actually can’t move at all. Shopping even is still hard. It is really hard to find food I like, so I don’t even try to use it or find it anymore. I still have a feeling I am really not from here, so I have to keep trying really hard in my life every day. Sometimes, for example, I just wish the Germans could really stop and listen to me and not just correct me all the time. I am grateful when they can teach me about language, but sometimes I feel they are too busy to correct me rather than just listen. (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017)

These challenges interconnect with one another and are not simply located in one area in which a single, clear intervention might be possible. Certainly, his legal status is a foundational component of his difficulties. When I speak to VM, he reminds me that he still does not have a final decision on his asylum application, which has been under consideration for over 2 years, even though he has engaged a lawyer, taken up a training position and achieved a working knowledge of German. His legal status is one reason why he still lives at the emergency shelter. While he is thankful to have found a training position, he still expresses frustration that an earlier job with a large accounting firm in Düsseldorf fell through, due to, as he explains, bureaucratic hiring complications associated with his unadjudicated asylum claim.

But his struggles to execute his choices go beyond these rote legal challenges, expanding into areas of his employment and living situations. He mentions the stresses of constantly dirty shelter facilities, of fights that always break out in the shared shelter kitchen because residents don’t like the smells of each other’s cooking, of living under the surveillance of increasing security patrols around the shelter because neighborhood residents were worried about terrorism threats. He discusses the difficulty with studying and working when he previously lives in the area of the shelter with open bunks. His ability to live in a more private, enclosed room with another person is a request granted only recently at the discretion of shelter management. He wishes to advance further in his employment position, but is having difficulty doing so because he is unable to complete additional work and necessary tasks from home. He is not permitted to wire his company-issued computer for internet at the shelter because it is not considered an address by the internet provider companies he can access. When attempting to find a solution, he is met with refusal from

shelter administrators and local Job Center officials to assist him in crafting exception-to-policy letters or documents. He still requires the specific intervention of a sympathetic municipal employee to obtain this training position in the first place. He tells me how he “just tries to get along with it,” that is, the seemingly unchanging drudgery of these compounding issues, because he often feels that action will not amount to change. He explains, “I personally do not want any trouble. [...] Generally, it is not safe to give others trouble. They will just give you trouble back and find the faults in you” (Interview with VM, September 19, 2017).

As these issues build on one another across domains, they shape his views of his empowerment within the structural conditions of living as an asylum seeker. When VM describes above how he envisions the life he would choose himself, it includes a job more relevant to his actual skills and training, the ability to move out of a shelter and legal finality. But it also includes more existential desires, such as a greater conceptual feeling of control in driving these outcomes, as well as more ability to perhaps exist alongside Germans, and not merely as a subset of those who are here, but will never fully be. Recalling Ager and Strang (2008) and Castles et al. (2002, p. 124), as integration can often be positioned “a kind of medicine that new-comers should take in order to ‘fit in,’” as opposed to a two-way relationship of understanding and concessions from both ends, VM lacks the full realization of empowerment because his choices, despite his own agency and desires, seem to bring about an end of feeling like his existence within German life is conditional upon so many prescribed behaviors. He cannot be what he himself would like to be; rather, in a way, he must be how the structures tell him he must be.

VM’s experiences are illustrative of the complex and dependent interactions between agency and structure demonstrated throughout the manuscript. His example—and those of the other refugee migrants with varied repositories of agency within the study—illustrate that individual resources, skills and even motivation are not always tools enough to straightforwardly surpass legal bounds dictating access to not only training, jobs or types of residence, but more existentially, the planning and choosing of different life courses. In particular, the detailed profiles of participants presented at the chapters’ beginnings highlight the interconnectedness of these areas, as themes within them repeat and demonstrate their inherently intersecting qualities. These challenges intermingle across domains of living, building upon one another, such that even as governance structures might begin to allow for more possibilities in some areas in theory, their manifestation and interactions with conditions of living in actuality can still create barriers for individuals choosing their own ways forward as legal, economic and social actors.

8.1 Review of the research findings

For the individual refugee participants in this study and those whom experts and literature discuss more generally, as their length of time in Germany grows, so too do aspirations and goals, moving from survive to thrive. But as structures continue to remain prescriptive in execution, these ends often continue to be difficult to reach. Like VM’s story, a Red Cross volunteer coordinator summarizes this interaction, explaining the growing existential aspirations of the refugees she has worked with in her professional context and the practical difficulties in reaching them across domains, given the structures that define them:

At the moment, it is just a completely different situation, as I see it with regards to the refugees. [...] There are now different preoccupations. The first were more like arrival, the welcome, the first steps of learning German, the first steps of getting to know one another within community integration. But now the themes have shifted: “I need an apartment,” “I need a job,” “My children need to go to kindergarten, to school,” “I want to stay here,” “I want to achieve something,” “I want to integrate in this community.” So especially here, with the local [conditions...], integration is made more difficult for refugees. Then there is also frustration in this regard when one finds oneself remaining longer and longer in a huge emergency shelter.” (Interview with municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross, January 25, 2018)

Unlike in many more destitute conditions of refugee living—where assets may be physically scarce and legal prohibitions even more explicit—insights from this local German context show that even when agency may exist to apply, and structures may permit its application in theory, choice itself may still be impractical to execute, or simply not lead to the desired ends of achieving something. This study has explored the nature of these interactions within the dynamics of a local case study in Cologne. The remainder of this concluding chapter recounts the main findings and describes these interactions. It anchors this final discussion within the context of empowerment possibilities across the broader cases of refugee living and suggests ways that the work might contribute to future policy and research endeavors, seeking to construct more mutually beneficial conditions for refugees to thrive in their new communities.

The primary research question of this thesis asks, to what extent are refugees empowered in their daily lives to improve legal, economic and sociocultural challenges that governmental institutional structures create? The primary answer is that, as it pertains to the refugee participants, those referenced directly by experts and those discussed collectively in secondary literature, empowerment for change is constrained in legal, economic and sociocultural domains, with respect to qualities of agency and opportunity structure that influence the capacity for choice. Agency as assets and capabilities is slowly expanding across domains. In the study context, refugees increasingly value, strive for and gather agency in the form of understanding complex case information, pursuing favorable legal statuses, learning German, seeking employment, establishing homes, feeling less isolated, building connections with Germans and sensing psychological peace. Legal frameworks, however, do not necessarily align to allow for the most effective building or application of these agency components. As expert interviews and documentary evidence support, although becoming more progressive in some ways and providing adequate levels of basic material support, the levels of governmental opportunity structure regarding benefits, services and rights changes rapidly, creating great instability in what can be pursued as solutions to issues in daily life. Similarly, complex, hierarchical systems of execution limit clear entry points for refugees' dynamic engagement with them. As such, the refugees in the study context encounter difficulties executing choices to reach the goals they value. Whether choices break down at the level of presence, use or effectiveness varies contextually. Origin country or residency status can eliminate the presence of choice, in terms of imposing explicit legal prohibitions. Sociodemographic assets—such as gender, family status, language skills, education or professional background—situationally threaten the use or effectiveness of choice, as individuals reconcile their former identities within new state-determined possibilities for social participation, as well as doubt realistic possibilities to reach the increasingly existential employment, home, stability and belonging outcomes they aspire to. These themes repeat across domains and frequently feed into one another.

Perhaps this primary finding may be criticized for a lack of novelty, as previous research in Germany has clearly demonstrated that refugees have far from easy roads towards meeting so-called success metrics of integration. The answer to this potential criticism, however, is that it is a finding that still exists after time, that there are still improvements to consider, even years after the initial influx of refugee migration in a municipal context that is presumably more sympathetic to the struggles of refugee migrants. The results highlight the pace of change, that it is slow, not guaranteed and not merely incumbent upon refugees themselves to decipher. The importance of this sentiment is shared by Brücker et al. (2020), who concludes in recent analysis that “the economic and social integration of refugees takes a great amount of time” (p. 48). Similarly, the results of this study challenge elements of contentious public discourse, especially as they manifest within increasingly extremist viewpoints, that refugees may simply not be trying hard enough. Simply being in a broadly progressive country for a set number of years does not somehow ensure that life has advanced and conditions are better, that agency factors at hand have expanded or that opportunity structures have been made more operationally successful by the changes that have occurred. These findings can serve as a check-in point, a reminder that despite progress and changes in more beneficial policy directions, structural impediments to agency application still exist to be considered for modification.

To enhance these points of understanding and point to more specific areas of possible improvement, this thesis has also explored related sub-research questions that help clarify how the interactions of agency, opportunity structure and empowerment function across the various domains of living. The first sub-question asks, what is the current context of Germany's recent influx of refugee migration, beginning in 2015? The answer to this question underlies the primary justification for Germany's selection as a case of inquiry. 2015 is generally regarded as a turning point in Germany's recent refugee migration history. Since then, nearly 2 million individuals have filed asylum applications in Germany (BAMF, 2020a), and more individuals are increasingly living with refugee protection-related statuses. Its leaders have taken the opportunity to challenge other EU nations to prioritize the acceptance of asylum applications as a humanitarian endeavor. At the local municipal level, governance actors in Cologne have continued their past commitments towards finding ways to support refugees where flexibility is permitted, more holistically in keeping with historical municipal climates of general inclusion and civic involvement. At the same time, as close examination of legal structures and their varying levels of execution show, Germany's (and obviously Cologne's) refugees are not removed from experiencing broad institutional difficulties, such as procedural efficiency in adjudicating claims, limitations on the freedom of movement and practical access to the labor market. The large numbers of newcomers have taxed federal and local resource provisioning systems. Despite Cologne's past commitments to refugee inclusion, especially as highlighted frequently via expert interviews, its own municipal structures and resources have been under-prepared to account for the reality of the numbers of newcomers. Management discretion in executing the terms of status, especially precarious toleration statuses, exists at the local level, which can provide possible flexibility in assisting individuals but also make some individually driven management outcomes seem arbitrary to refugees. These factors have maintained a general air of uncertainty and instability, although interviews with local governance and civil society actors highlight that they are working to find ways to at least attempt to create possibilities for more positive outcomes in refugees' lives.

The second sub-question asks, what is the nature of the governmental opportunity structures that drive the bounds of refugees' daily lives? To this end, as legal documents show in their content, the premises of many legal structures are theoretically humanitarian, in that they have shifted in recent years to find ways to become more explicitly inclusive. In this way, these changes represent national commitments to proving Germany's new position as a migration country. The extent to which this is evident, however, varies with regards to the domain of inquiry. Economic legal structures are offering more theoretical possibility for empowered choice, that is, the presence of choice is often more clearly enumerated at higher levels with respect to being able to pursue work at earlier stages of the asylum process, along with fewer restrictions like citizen priority checks. Political and sociocultural structures are somewhat more explicitly restrictive. Legal rights and entitlements are complex, quickly changing and highly dependent on adjudication status and thus may frequently disallow certain actions that could assist in the goal of moving on (for example, earlier access to language courses and family reunification rights). Sociocultural structures dictate heavily where refugees can live and how they can interact within the surrounding communities. Shelter rules are similarly rigidly administrated through municipal contracts, such that rules of visiting, cooking, washing, spending leisure time and engaging in service offerings are determined by shelter administrators and TSO organizations supporting them. These multiple levels of execution also add complexity and uncertainty, in terms of increasing the number of nodes of responsibility and possible points of bureaucracy, breakdown or inefficiency for refugees to contend with, both in the study context and generally as reported in literature.

The third sub-question asks, to what extent do these structures support refugees in using their assets and capabilities to address their needs and aspirations? To this end, the assets, capabilities and goals of refugees in the study context are not necessarily supported wholly by opportunity structures in execution, especially given that emergency conditions have largely passed and many of their goals are centered around the concept of moving on with life, as opposed to merely surviving. The nature of structural provisioning can

contribute to reductions in agency, which together contribute to participants' inability to easily apply choice. For example, interviews and observations show that psychological health worsens with lengthy administrative processes and decreases motivation to choose to work through various types of everyday problems. Physical health worsens with requirements to live in shelters (or practical inability to move out of them) and decreases physical ability or choice to take on work or additional learning. Human capital assets may be similarly depressed, for example, when language course offerings are inadequate and thus language proficiency is not reached to meet employment thresholds, even if individuals would choose to be employed if they could. Similarly, job training or placement structures have not shown great rates of success in employing refugees generally, much less in meaningful positions always matching their skills or desires for ideal types of employment; the experiences of the individual participants also confirm this more general trend, as they show through their reflections on pursuing employment and employment-related skills. Additionally, for them, a follow-on issue frequently remains that without reliable means of income, their material and financial assets remain low, creating practical difficulty in choosing to spend money for items determined necessary to move on (ex., school materials for children, extra language tutoring, larger household items, apartment deposits) or improve chances of legal success (ex., translators, legal assistance).

The answer to this sub-question can also address the aforementioned possible criticism of the results, in that it highlights the importance of time within the context of evaluation. Had the research questions been focused on engaging with refugee participants and governance actors at the time of immediate arrival, it is likely a different answer set would have emerged in terms of the nature of agency, the bounds of structure and the success or failure of meeting desired ends. In other words, if conditions of agency and other aspirations were simply to survive and acquire the basic means of subsistence, an assessment of structures meeting that end might have been evaluated to be more successful or relevant. But as time has gone on, and it appears less likely that the participants will return to their countries of origin, they discuss how they seek ways to establish themselves as opposed to simply exist. They seek means of finding independence and permanence, along with the psychological satisfaction of taking care of themselves and focusing on family and personal matters, without living under a constant cloud of uncertainty, questioning if such outcomes are possible or relevant to try to pursue at all.

The final sub-question asks, what specific actions are refugees empowered to undertake (or not) in order to address identified gaps? To this end, the individuals in the study context are complying with and choosing to go forward with required motions that seem structurally and practically relevant to moving on. They are attending integration classes, learning German, attempting to follow legal procedures and seeking community inroads (through engaging with volunteers and community groups). They are also forming clear ideas of the shortcomings they experience and the ends they would like to reach instead. They want more legal rights in the form of residency certainty and service access equality, more economic possibilities in the form of reasonable chances at employment and secure financial health and more sociocultural possibilities to live where they want, build homes, become members of surrounding communities and take care of their families in culturally meaningful ways. But executional barriers and uncertainty are still dominant qualities of opportunity structure, preventing certain actions from taking place at all (at worst) or progressing with precariousness at best, meaning frequent instability in the operating environment of choice and action.

In terms of empowered actions, choice may be available, but it is not always practical to use, nor can it always advance towards desired ends, even if used. Merely understanding state-required motions or even going through them does not necessarily advance the study's refugee participants closer to the ends they seek, nor do they report that they can rely on each other within shelter spaces to find their own bottom-up solutions to move forward. Their shelters are diverse and heterogeneous. There is a lack of common language, culture and legal status with which to identify with one another. There is transience and impermanence, fear and paranoia. There is jealousy and misunderstanding. These latter factors relate to rote components of opportunity structure and thus negatively influence empowered action. Components

specifically include municipal and state processes that direct frequent shelter transfers and oversee shelter composition, as well as higher-level laws that define the myriad of complex residency statuses that are difficult to understand and make it hard to comprehend how two similar cases can result in such drastically different legal outcomes. Organizational structures of the shelter-managing TSOs further legislate the bounds of activity down to the micro-level of shelter cadences to define how life looks living there. These relationships are seen in the content of government documents, as well as refugee and expert interviews.

While the study's refugee participants experience compromised possibilities for fully empowered choice, across domains, more exists at a level of actor above them, where there is more explicit capacity to find, choose and pursue avenues for change and inclusion. The level of civil society or local governance is positioned as this more empowered intermediary to enhance the effectiveness of individuals' choices and actions, both at the level of study participants, but also more generally in Cologne as a matter of operating climate. These are the social workers, the volunteers, the engaged government case workers and lawyers who serve as entry points to interacting with or possibly modifying a highly complex system. This is highlighted not only through observations of how shelter life is run, but especially through the refugees' interviews as they emphasize the personal value of developing connections with these types of individuals. Experts underscore similarly, as they discuss how such individuals are structurally positioned to act as intermediaries in concrete, logistical ways, working through a variety of structural, executional challenges.

They represent the entry point for street level bureaucracy, for the individuality of circumstance to be considered only when an informed, well-positioned individual can figure out how to bend or work within the immediate structures around them in ways that would be unknowable or unreachable to refugees themselves. They are the strategies like knowing what forms to fill out and with what specific verbiage; knowing what lawyers can file what motions for specific case interventions. They are connections to landlords, employers or educators who can fast-track applications or take particular sympathies in advancing a petition to transfer shelters, expedite a toleration extension, approve a work permit or discover a gray-zone to allow for a residency permit. They are personal patronages that find access to household goods, specific support services or ways out of the status quo that are difficult to find alone. They are interactions with volunteers positioned as political activists or lobbyists who can elevate specific concerns at relevant local governance meetings or forums, when there is little way for refugees to do so directly, especially as governance actors themselves have placed high levels of value on these intermediaries and bolster them through municipal financing and explicit collaboration projects. Empowerment is enhanced when refugee individuals possess these connection points to bolster the effectiveness of their own desires and actions.

At the same time, refugees in the study also demonstrate empowerment through prioritizing family values and undertaking familiar means of homemaking, as seen through observations of their manipulations of shelter living spaces. Although imperfect when compared to the most ideal outcomes they might prefer—living in their own homes with more freedom to construct domestic life—they still often find ways to decorate their spaces with second-hand items, arrange issued furniture in ways that resemble their former homes, entertain volunteers with small foodstuffs, celebrate religious holidays and use available funds to purchase familiar foods and prepare them in rudimentary shelter kitchens. They attempt to prioritize these activities when able, especially so their children might retain parts of their past and they themselves might derive energy from rebuilding elements of what is familiar and certain amid ongoing uncertainty. Within the family context in particular, the cadence of cooking, entertaining, sewing, caring for children and keeping gendered or religious spaces within the domestic domain offers a way for refugees to partake in a deliberate choice to structure their lives how they feel they might be more meaningful, as opposed to feeling forced to participate in a more German concept of meaning in which “everyone must work,” in particular accordance with requirements of welfare structures. Through these practices of everyday living, even when less embellished, refugees find empowered ways to combat turbulence with their own creative constructions of culturally meaningful elements of normalcy.

8.2 The status of the German case within the spectrum of refugee empowerment possibilities

These findings, patterns and common themes can be contextualized within the recommendations from literature (Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2) on the qualities of agency and opportunity structure that produce the most potentially mutually beneficial outcomes for refugees and their new host communities. These themes repeat across domains, and as the discussion suggests, frequently feed into one another.

The first consolidation from literature suggests that more optimally constructed and executed opportunity structures align with elements of refugees' agency, especially their goals, preferences and aspirations. Overall, the study finds misalignment in this regard. In the study context, refugees often arrive with high aspirations that they will be able to better their lives in Germany. However, the complexity, length and uncertainty of the asylum process itself can negatively influence psychological aspirations and assets; as the participants find themselves living in shelters for months and years beyond arrival, without clear prospects for moving, jobs or legal advancement, they consistently feel reduced hope that a different trajectory is easily reachable. Further misalignments seem especially acute with regards to finding employment and private homes. In the study, refugees come with diverse human capital resources—including experiences in industrial, media, educational, medical, corporate and small business sectors—that they could presumably apply in Germany. But opportunity structure makes these human capital assets particularly difficult to apply in the local context. Although labor market access has become more permissive at national levels, skill equivalencies are still strictly adjudicated at local levels. According to experts, as well as documentary evidence, large practical hurdles remain to transferring past skills to new professional endeavors. How the study's participating refugees describe their own experiences with employment issues is similar. In the study context, not a single refugee participant finds work in the same arena as he or she worked in previously; few are employed at all. This remains true even for jobs such as cooks or tailors, and refugees discuss difficulties pursuing even new, lower-skilled jobs such as salon workers or hotel maids due to extensive language and other schooling requirements, even when they express flexibility and openness to retraining. More generally, from the perspectives of experts working with Cologne's refugees at large, precarious legal statuses, developing language skills and even age make many employers reluctant to take them into jobs or training programs. Similarly in the study, the residents living in shelters express acute desires to move out of them and into private homes, but are often constrained by inability to accumulate large monetary sums for deposits due to lack of employment, reluctance of landlords to rent to potentially short-term tenants relying on welfare and general constrained municipal housing markets, which are unable to expand due to local resources and building codes, according to experts and documentary support. These are examples of misalignments in agency-structure relationships; there are specific desires and agency to be applied, and even structure to theoretically support their use, but a breakdown in structural execution in helping individual refugees reach the ends they seek. Similar trends are also demonstrated in other areas of Germany according to the review of literature.

Secondly, optimal structures consider local conditions of resource availability and possibilities for agency applications. Reinforcing the previous point, the study finds room for improvement here. With respect to employment, while some large German firms have constructed training schemes that recruit and train refugees in the local area, this is not necessarily performed a matter of course, nor is it a major source of refugee employment in Cologne, specifically. If anything, various experiences from the study's refugee participants reveal difficulty aligning skills within local industry, for example, the local scene of ethnic restaurants, factory facilities or multi-national corporations. Housing fares similarly. Although local governance actors frequently note how they are aware of the housing market difficulties, governance processes to adjust building times and consider the development of low-income or income-controlled housing projects are not accelerated, despite their urgent need. Governance actors interviewed express theoretical desires for acceleration in timelines, but are unable to affect them in actuality.

On the other hand, as in other areas of Germany, local volunteer networks and capacity are highly utilized in Cologne, capitalizing on the city's rich history of civic engagement. The local welcome initiatives are extensive and community-oriented, with many key actors playing roles in both grassroots and formal organizational or employment capacities. Various interviews with TSO and shelter workers illustrate this point; many had begun their refugee-related work as volunteers in local welcome initiatives, but later escalated to formal positions within TSOs, or redirected their existing professional expertise to refugee-facing positions. The city has recognized the key role of these support structures and continued to formalize and fund them through local budgets and political resolutions. In this way, the power and availability of local volunteer resources are being heavily utilized to advance improvements in refugee living.

Another key thematic point from literature suggests that opportunity structures should not presume that refugees want to be or remain wholly dependent on aid. As discussed above, the study generally supports this conclusion. Disconnect between federal and local levels has impeded wholly inclusive policy implementation and created some executional barriers towards reaching more independent ends. There are some federal systems in Germany that are unlikely to be changed extensively, for example, the dual-track education and training system. But the study reveals some difficulties in local solutions to alleviate such difficulties. The Job Center still directs refugees through the welfare and employment-seeking process (with low rates of employment), local possibilities for flexible career entry are not apparent and intermediaries remain highly in control of finding channels to either deal with or circumvent these types of challenges.

At the same time, literature also reveals that policies should not over-emphasize the complete self-reliance of refugees in that they should be completely cut off from any types of interventions or resource-related aid. The study supports the notion that Germany is doing this well in this regard, in that it does not eschew welfare provisioning for refugees and generally attempts to root provisioning principles within concepts of human dignity, providing a minimum standard of existence in line with society-wide welfare policy. At the same time, it is often the aforementioned misalignments in agency-structure interactions that maintain and perpetuate refugees' general dependence on state structures in the first place. Although broader German political aims do not necessarily suggest that they seek to cut refugees completely lose from these structures of support, integration measures are attempting to advance refugees in the direction of self-provisioning with lower degrees of success, often because the barriers to success are not being simultaneously addressed. Recalling various international contexts, Easton-Calabria and Omata (2018) point out that the notion of self-reliance is often closely linked with minimal state assistance. The study reveals that the German case might broadly present a strong example of how self-reliance could find ways to succeed with high levels of state assistance, so long as such assistance can better align the manifestation of policy with the aims of individual refugees. If anything, state support structures providing language assistance, welfare payments to avoid destitution while transitioning to German life and TSO aid can address substantial asset shortcomings that, if completely unsupported, would likely make the possibility for many empowered choices even more precarious. At the same time, the structures must be honestly evaluated for their effectiveness, not with the aim to reduce the critical support they provide, but rather, to optimize how they might more reliably propel refugees forward towards their own desires to become more independent and provide for themselves.

Finally, a common outcome in both German and international literature is that refugees frequently capitalize on other intermediary actors with more resources or structural, legal positioning to be able to reach an end. The study robustly confirms this characteristic. In the study context, the clearest indications of empowered ways towards advancing choices for living are most frequently associated with individuals' deep, anchored ties to German community members positioned as advocates, as described by Bernhard (2021) and Gericke et al. (2018). These particularly engaged intermediaries act on behalf of refugees to overcome various material and structural barriers that the participating refugees, as well as those discussed generally by experts, find difficult to breach alone. Key areas of assistance are improving German skills, finding

apartments, furnishing those apartments, finding employment inroads and helping resolve legal questions. In the study context, especially in the field shelters, residents do not turn to one another as sources of these deep connections, generally speaking. Although they sometimes turn to one another for psychological support or friendships, they do not view these connections as quintessential to solving key existential problems like obtaining a job or moving out of a shelter or even finding new identities or senses of belonging and rootedness.

Ultimately, especially in line with other literature from the German context, this study finds that the refugees in focus are neither singularly fully empowered nor fully disempowered. They suffer neither from an extreme absence of agency, nor an extremely oppressive structural environment. Rather, this study suggests that expansions in agency are misaligned with expansions in opportunity structure, in that the inclusiveness that is developing within legal frameworks is not always accurately able to target or enhance agency in the ways that refugees find the most relevant. In a conclusion drawing upon national-level quantitative and qualitative data, Brücker et al. (2020) convey an extremely similar sentiment:

Our findings do not provide any indication that the recent influx of refugees to Germany has created severe economic and social disarrays, justifying the term “refugee crisis.” In contrast, the institutional framework and the provision of language and other programs has adjusted relatively rapidly to the new challenge. Although [...] the success of the integration process depends on the ability of institutions to effectively address issues regarding legal certainty, housing and family support, language, education, and job training (p. 48).

In this study context, refugees increasingly value and gather agency in the form of understanding legal information, pursuing better legal statuses, learning German, seeking employment, establishing homes, feeling less isolated, building connections with Germans and sensing psychological peace. But opportunity structures must ideally find more ways to support these ends in execution, as opposed to merely expanding possibilities in a theoretical sense at national levels, while failing to improve their execution at local ones.

8.3 Policy implications and recommendations for mutually beneficial ways forward

While policy makers ought to exercise caution in deriving comprehensive policy changes exclusively from non-representative studies, they can nonetheless offer foundations for further research and contribute to assessing the scope of potential issues in a specific policy context to inform more relevant solutions. To this point, qualitative case studies throughout Germany have examined different localities with different tools and analytical lenses (Chapter 3, Sections 3.2.3.1–2), arriving at similar conclusions to those in this work. As such, this study adds to the body of accumulated and triangulated knowledge assisting with the collective generalizability of these other qualitatively derived conclusions, substantiating concepts from previous research that has been conducted on refugee life in Germany. This final section therefore focuses on how the study’s findings can contribute to recommendations for future policy and research endeavors, seeking to elaborate mutually beneficial ways forward for refugees and their new communities. Research plays the role of tracking the results of these possible recommendations, as critical, scientific evaluations of experimental programs and targeted interventions could presumably determine their effectiveness and help to lobby for wider-scale implementation at higher levels.

The evaluation of the interactions and challenges the study describes may run the risk of presenting a hopeless outlook for refugees if considered pessimistically, that the system is too oppressive to ever overcome, that goals cannot be reached, that agency cannot be effectively applied. However, to interpret the findings in this regard would be to ignore the nuances and context discussed, as well as to neglect the areas of progress and success. The study describes, rather, that legal systems, at a broad level, have assisted the individual refugees in the study, as well as Germany’s refugees more broadly, in surviving times of emergency arrival, continuing to avoid large scale destitution, homelessness, starvation or high mortality—bare life, so to speak. There is positivity in that life is beginning to move on in some ways and there are more

demonstrated theoretical commitments to promoting inclusivity in general legal structures. As the study occurred between 2017 and 2018, more legal changes have taken place by the time of publication. Although this instability may remain presumably difficult to contend with on a day-to-day operational level, policies are still changing nonetheless. Refugee integration is still a topic of public concern. There is acknowledgment that improvement can and should continue to grow. The study attempts to emphasize the caveat that it is happening slowly and without a greater degree of control, as demonstrated by the difficulty of the study's participating and collectively referenced refugees to fully execute the choices they would like in advancing to stages beyond provisional living. It emphasizes that interventions should focus on better aligning policy changes with these ways that refugees individually aspire to move forward. To that end, policy recommendations and areas for further research may be concentrated around the following points, based on the study findings.

First, national-level successes so far can be specifically acknowledged to build upon. Federal labor market policy has expanded and offered more theoretical inroads towards employment, when compared to policies even 5 to 10 years in the past. Employment rates of refugee migrants are increasing, even if slowly. Welfare structures have kept individuals fed and housed as they attempt to establish themselves. There have been laudable efforts to emphasize school obligation for young, refugee children. Although the specifics around integration and language course eligibility have been in dispute, there is an important emphasis on providing language learning channels that refugees are attempting to take up in various manners throughout stages of their asylum processes. These offerings should be maintained, in the sense that they fill key resource needs that would be difficult to obtain independently given the nature of current legal and policy execution frameworks. Given how critical this language learning appears to be both from the findings of the literature review, as well as the sentiments of both participating refugees and experts in the study context, a key suggestion is to explore reducing the restrictions on integration course access, especially as they pertain to those arriving from neither low- nor high-probability to remain countries. Unless adjudication timelines can be vastly streamlined or made far clearer, the practical likelihood that such asylum seekers will remain in Germany for longer periods of time increases, especially when rejections are often remediated by ongoing toleration statuses or court-case reversals. As language is an essential component of agency to enhance the potential to tackle economically and psychologically challenging circumstances, it is sensible to continue to evaluate how access can be expanded in a practical manner.

Second, at the same time, break-down points to the execution of laws and specific programs, especially at the local level, must be examined for targeted areas of improvement. Employment law, for example, continues to be more permissive at federal levels, but restrictive at more implementation-based local levels. Therefore, targets for intervention might focus on improvements that to reduce local barriers to employment. These obviously depend on the climate of locality more specifically, but based on the conditions and findings within the study context, might more generally encompass changes such as local government and industry actors working together to: reduce language and training requirements for low-skilled jobs in particular; design language courses to be combined directly with job training programs for more hands-on learning; expand equivalency retraining offerings where refugees can undertake lower-cost or free education to make up their skills differentials; work with larger or multi-national firms who might have greater flexibility to employ individuals (especially with specific technical or language skills) under work-related visas; and collaborate with local trade guilds to develop clear methods for skills equivalency testing when training or educational documents are unavailable. These types of methods might offer more entry points for more meaningful engagement within the labor market, while working within the confines of dual-track education and training structures that likely cannot be completely overhauled.

More meaningful engagement within the labor market is also tied to the recommendation that structures must find ways to better subsume individual components of identity and preference, such as gender, familial roles, age and professional identification. For example, various female participants in the

study, particularly those with children, underscore personal difficulties engaging in labor-market measures related to being both mothers and females. From the aspect of their maternalism, a lack of language courses with childcare and a lack of availability in childcare facilities makes attendance in either formal or informal courses difficult. From the aspect of their familial roles and desires as women, various participants question how they might move forward in Germany with cultural and legal pressures to take up paid work, when their individual and cultural preferences are to continue to remain engaged in domestic work. Male participants, on the other hand, sometimes express frustration at their inability, practically speaking, to take on any type of work at all (even low-skilled work), that might enhance their familial desires to be responsible providers, bolster senses of psychological and cultural purpose and demonstrate good work ethic to their children. Middle-aged refugees (roughly between mid-20s and mid-40s) in the study—those beyond ages easily subsumed into the education system, but yet still with many working years ahead—often experience reluctance of employers to take them into training programs and few practical channels to fulfill educational needs to restart careers. Similarly, for those who had taken on more complex professional pursuits in their origin countries, such as obtaining advanced degrees, idleness and low practical chances to obtaining entrepreneurial or high-skilled work appear to lessen their motivation to participate in employment measures and exacerbate psychological stress.

To address these types of issues, labor-market measures could continue to expand offerings to include childcare, as municipal structures simultaneously work to expand availability in childcare more generally. Structures might also pivot to support part-time work schemes or family-based (as opposed to individual-based) work requirements in certain welfare conditions. Age requirements for vocational schools and training programs should be functionally eliminated, and employers encouraged to train and hire individuals shown to meet language requirements and skills equivalencies. Combined with finding ways to open up practical channels to employment as mentioned previously, such endeavors might make a wider variety of different types of work available to individuals desiring different arrangements of employment circumstances. Clearer working connections between government actors (ex., Job Center councilors), social workers and employers with availability could also facilitate more relevant job entry points for refugees. These individuals might be better positioned to take into account such individual preferences and match them to specific, tailored opportunities and programs.

Shelter provisioning is another area where specific policy or research endeavors can find room for expansion and intervention at local levels. Restrictions in housing choice often occur because constrained local real estate markets and building conditions make transfers out of shelters difficult. To this end, especially if these broader building conditions cannot be easily modified, local governments should permit more flexibility within the design and management of shelter spaces, especially if TSOs can propose efficient ways to work within constrained urban spaces with principles of inclusive, refugee-centered design in mind. While propositions such as apartment buildings built over flat parking areas or refugee-community managed co-op style, work-live arrangements have been found occasionally in large cities, they are undertaken very infrequently. Therefore, it is unknown—from both policy and research perspectives—if they would work as more scalable solutions as a solution to housing issues. As housing difficulties for refugees remain prolific across the country and demand resolutions that have not yet been found, local administrators should remain more open to these experimental types of solutions that local TSOs would be well-positioned to manage and researchers capable to track and evaluate.

Another recommendation comes with acknowledging the progress refugees are in fact driving in their lives and integrating their experiences into changes. Despite restrictions and rudimentary living circumstances, refugees in the study show they continuously find ways to live elements of their culture and prioritize their family values. These actions demonstrate areas of choice and empowerment that are occurring, which also enhance elements of mental health and more positive feelings of adjustment. As such, policy must find ways to bolster this essential channel of individuality and diversity. This can be done

primarily through prioritizing transfers out of shelters and ensuring that private accommodation can be reached as soon as able. When quick transfers out of shelters are not possible, shelter structures must incur more stability in placement and more flexibility in individuals being able to determine the bounds of home life. While ongoing shelter living will not solve more fundamental issues with it (ex., conflict, lack of community or general feelings of lack of control as reported both in literature and in the study context), more privacy, more freedom in domestic living and more stability in physical residency location can help with developing daily activities that help with coping and having control over the cadence of home life.

Additionally, although often still difficult for refugees in the study context to build, connections to intermediaries can still offer more assured way to reach goals and apply agency within opportunity structures, evidenced both in literature, as well as through the prominence of this theme throughout the study's empirical chapters. Although more easily applied individual choice would be ideal, connections to intermediaries still appear a relevant channel to enhance refugee empowerment nonetheless. Therefore, as the policy structures work to become more open, less complex, more stable and more permissive, it is important to keep emphasis on the channels for moving forward that do exist. Despite the level of effort required from volunteers, their efforts must continue to be acknowledged and supported. They also represent insight that local governance actors may draw from regarding the bureaucratic and operational difficulties that refugees face in applying agency to reach changing goals. At the same time, the ongoing critical role of volunteers highlights the need to continue to find ways to direct choice and empowerment towards refugees themselves, enhancing mechanisms for them to share their own experiences and drive their own life changes. As previously noted, this can be particularly enhanced through greater possibilities for defining the bounds of home life, learning language and increasing chances of finding meaningful employment.

Finally, perhaps the broadest, strongest recommendation is that a clearer reconciliation of an approach of protectionism or integration must be made nationally and advanced more harmoniously at all levels of governance and execution. As the detailed individual profiles of participants illustrate, along with the shorter collections of other participants' experiences and expert insights within the manuscript, this point is especially critical because the various inadequacies of structure and agency interactions continuously build upon one another, rooted in general legal status and uncertainty, to create vicious, ongoing feedback loops among conditions of financial, personal and mental security that curtail motivation to find ways to move forward. General political streamlining from the top-down can commit to ending the mid- and local-level breakdown points that can exacerbate and perpetuate these feedback loops. Structure cannot merely be open on paper; it must be open in function at local levels where execution occurs.

Fundamentally, this can be most clearly advanced through more streamlined processes for initial asylum decisions at the national level. Speed and consistent evaluation standards must be prioritized to ensure clear, quick outcomes that do not create protracted conditions of legal uncertainty as a matter of course, in which initial decisions linger in undecided status for months or years. This still-common occurrence continues to limit opportunities related to language classes, employment, private home rentals or improved psychological health at the refugee level and limit operational and resource certainty at the municipal execution level. Fairer, quicker and more consistent evaluations at the national level may also help to reduce the arbitrary or complex adjudications that occur in response at levels of courts or local foreigners' authorities. Such fundamental legal improvements have clear benefits for both local municipalities, as well as refugees as a broad migrant group. Municipalities would be able to better execute clear, stable offerings for individuals with legal statuses unlikely to change. Individuals would not only have quicker legal permissions to act in certain capacities, but psychological assurance that their statuses would remain, better motivating them to find ways to overcome challenges and see their efforts as worthwhile in offering meaningful returns.

Ultimately, a true, philosophical governance commitment to seeing the agency, aspirations and diversity of refugees could help reduce applications of a victim mentality, in which refugees are viewed more as a collective group the state must save, as opposed to individuals the state must support in applying themselves to live fruitful lives and holistically included within German society. If Germany truly wishes to settle the debate of whether it is a country of immigration, and whether it can rise to the challenge it has presumably welcomed, policy must commit to find ways to capitalize on refugees' unique contributions, helping them move forward to benefit themselves and the communities they live in.

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Laws and legal directives

GERMANY			
LAW / PROVISION	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	ACRONYM	NOTES, IF APPLICABLE
Anerkennungsgesetz	Recognition Act	BQFGEG	Passed as omnibus bill in 2012. Text of act modifying other laws available at: http://www.buzer.de/
Asylgesetz	Asylum Act	AsylG	
Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz	Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act	AsylbLG	1993 version also discussed
Asylkompromiss	Asylum Compromise	—	Comprised changes to the constitution and asylum procedure law in 1993
Asylverfahrensgesetz	Asylum Procedure Act	AsylVfG	
Asylverfahrensbeschleunigungsgesetz	Asylum Procedures Acceleration Act / Asylum Package II	AsylVfBeschIG	Text of act modifying other laws available at: http://www.buzer.de/
Ausländergesetz	Act on Foreigners	AusIG	Implemented 1965, replaced 2005 with Residence Act, via the Migration Act
Aufenthaltsgesetz	Residence Act	AufenthG	2005 modifications discussed in conjunction with Migration Act
Ausländerpolizeiverordnung	Police Decree on Foreigners	APVO	Implemented 1938, replaced 1965 with Act on Foreigners
Berufsbildungsgesetz	Vocational Training Act	BBiG	
Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz	Professional Qualification Assessment Act	BQFG	Modified under the Recognition Act; exists at federal and state levels
Beschäftigungsverordnung	Ordinance on the Employment of Foreign Nationals	BeschV	
Bundesverfassungsgericht, Urteil des Ersten Senats vom 18. Juli 2012, 1 BvL 10/10	German Constitutional Court, Judgment of the First Senate of 18 July 2012, No.1 BvL 10/10	BVerfG 1 BvL 10/10	
Grundgesetz	German Constitution / Basic Law	GG	
Handwerksordnung	Crafts and Trade Code	HwO	
Integrationsgesetz	Integration Act	InteG	Text of act modifying other laws available at: http://www.buzer.de/
Sozialgesetzbuch (I—XII)	Code of Social Law (Books I—XII)	SGB	Specific books referenced in text
Wohngeldgesetz	Housing Benefit Act	WoGG	
Zuwanderungsgesetz	Migration Act	ZuWG	Text of act modifying other laws available at: http://www.buzer.de/
Zweites Gesetz zur besseren Durchsetzung der Ausreisepflicht	Second Law to Improve Enforcement Of the Obligation to Leave the Country	—	Passed August, 2019, outside fieldwork period

NRW (STATE)			
LAW / PROVISION	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	ACRONYM	NOTES, IF APPLICABLE
Ausländer Wohnsitzregelungsverordnung	Residence Regulation for Foreigners	AwoV	
Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz	Professional Qualification Assessment Act	BQFG	
Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz	Refugee Admission Act	FlüAG	
Ordnungsbehördengesetz	Law of Public Order	OGB	

INTERNATIONAL		
GOVERNING BODY	TITLE	DIRECTIVE / IDENTIFICATION
European Union	Blue Card Directive (2009)	2009/50/EC
European Union	Common European Asylum System (consolidated 2016)	
	• Asylum Procedures Directive (2011)	2011/95/EU
	• Dublin Procedure (2013)	604/2013
	• EURODAC Regulation (2013)	603/2013
	• Qualifications Directive (2004)	2004/83/EC
	• Reception Standards Directive (2013)	2013/33/EU
European Union	Treaty of Lisbon (2007)	
United Nations	Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)	

Unless noted here or specifically within the manuscript text, versions of all laws refer to those which were current during the fieldwork period (May 2017–2018). Any cited secondary sources used to discuss laws have noted relevant time periods within the manuscript text.

Appendix A: Overview of refugee participants and interviewees

NAME	FAMILY STATUS	COUNTRY	SHELTER	YEARS	BACKGROUND	LEGAL	LANGUAGE
Family M1*	Husband (late-30s) Wife (late-30s) 4 children Extended family in Germany	Syria (Kurmanji Kurdish)	Shelter 1 (11/17) Shelter 4	2.5	Husband: <High school, technical-skilled Wife: <High school	1-year subsidiary Denied full recognition (1/18) Renewed 1-year (6/18)	German/Kurmanji with volunteer DRK interpreter
Family T1	Husband (mid-30s) Wife (mid-30s) 4 children	Turkey (Kurdish)	Shelter 1	2	Husband: <High school, technical-skilled Wife: <High school	Denial-in process of appeal	German
Family T2	Husband (mid-40s) Wife (early-40s) 9 children in shelter 3 adult children in Serbia Extended family in Germany	Serbia	Shelter 1	4	Husband: <High school, low-skilled Wife: <High school	Denial-Duldung (3-months)	German
Family H1*	Husband (early-40s) Wife (early-40s) 2 children Extended family in Germany	Iraq (Sorani Kurdish)	Shelter 1 (12/17)	2	Husband: No school, technical-skilled Wife: No school	1-year subsidiary (renewing)	German/Sorani with paid interpreter through large company
Family W1*	Husband (early-40s) Wife (early-40s) 2 children	Albania	Shelter 1	2.5	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: <Highschool	Denial-Duldung (6-months)	English/Albanian with volunteer university interpreter
Family D1*	Single woman (late-50s) 2 adult children (early-20s)	Albania	Shelter 1 (12/17) Shelter 3	3	Mother: No school, low-skilled Adult children: >High school, technical-skilled	Denial-Duldung (6-months)	English/Albanian with volunteer university interpreter

Family F2*	Husband (early-40s) Wife (late-30s) 2 children Extended family in Germany	Afghanistan	Shelter 1 (1/18) Private apartment	2.5	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: >High school, high skilled	1-year subsidiary	German/Dari with paid self-employed interpreter
Family A2*	Husband (mid-30s) Wife (late-20s) 2 children Extended family in Germany	Afghanistan (fled from Iran)	Shelter 1 (3/18) Private apartment	2.5	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: <High school	1-year subsidiary (renewing)	German/Dari with paid self-employed interpreter
C3*	Single woman (mid-20s) 1 child	Ghana	Shelter 1 (11/17) Shelter 3 (1/18) Private apartment	1.5	>High school	Asylum seeker Denial (1/18) Child residence (2/18)	English
P1*	Single woman (late-20s) 1 child	Nigeria	Shelter 1 (12/17) Shelter 3 (3/18) Private apartment	1.5	>High school	Asylum seeker Denial (12/17) Child residence (3/18)	English
Family G1	Husband (late-30s) Wife (mid-30s) 4 children in shelter 1 child in Iraq	Iraq (Yazidi)	Shelter 1	2	Husband: No school, low skilled Wife: No school	3-year full recognition	German
Family H5	Husband (early-40s) Wife (late-30s) 2 children	Afghanistan (fled from Iran)	Shelter 1	2	Husband: No school, low skilled Wife: No school, low skilled	Denial-Duldung In process of appeal	German
Family O1	Husband (mid-20s) Wife (early-20s) 2 children	Albania	Shelter 1	2	Husband: >High school, technical skilled Wife: <High school	Asylum seeker Denial-Duldung (3-months) (4/18)	German

Family N2	Husband (early-30s) Wife (late-20s) 3 children Extended family in Germany	Afghanistan	Shelter 1	2	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: <High school	1-year subsidiary	German (heavy use of German/ Farsi Google Translate)
E1*	Divorced, single woman (mid-30s) 3 children Ex-husband in Germany	Cameroon	Shelter 2 (1/18) Hotel (7/18) Private apartment	2.5	>High school	Asylum seeker Denial (11/17) Duldung / child residence (12/17)	English
X1*	Single woman (late-20s) 1 child Partner in Germany	Ghana	Shelter 2 (4/18) Other shelter	1.5	>High school	Asylum seeker Denial (9/17) Child residence (10/17)	English
Family SM	Husband (mid-50s) Wife (mid-50s) 1 adult child in shelter 1 minor child in shelter 6 adult children in Germany Extended family in Germany	Syria (Kurmanji Kurdish)	Shelter 3	3.5	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: <High school (Documented) adult child: >High school	Parents, minor child: 3-year full recognition Adult child: 3-year full recognition (renewed from 1-year 5/18)	German
Family UB	Husband (early-30s) Wife (mid-30s) 1 child Extended family in Germany	Wife: Syria (Kurmanji Kurdish) Husband: Iran (Sorani Kurdish)	Shelter 3	2	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: <High school, technical skilled	Wife, son: 1-year subsidiary Husband: Denial-Duldung (6-months)	German
Family P2	Husband (early-30s) Wife (early-30s) 4 children Husband's mother (mid-70s) Extended family in Germany	Syria (Kurmanji Kurdish)	Shelter 4	2.5	Husband: <High school, technical skilled Wife: <High school	3-year full recognition	German

Family F3	Husband (early-40s) Wife (mid-30s) 4 children Extended family in Germany	Syria (Kurmanji Kurdish)	Shelter 4	3	Husband: <High school, low skilled Wife: No school	3-year full recognition	German
A3*	Single woman (early-30s) 1 child in Syria Extended family in Germany	Syria (Arab)	Shelter 4	2.3	>High school, high skilled	3-year full recognition	English
VM*	Single man (mid-20s)	Bangladesh	Shelter 5 (not field site)	2.5	>High school, high skilled	Asylum seeker	English
Family N1*	Husband (mid-30s) Wife (late-20s) 1 child	Nigeria	Shelter 5 (not field site)	2.5	Husband: <High school, low skilled Wife: <High school	Asylum seeker	English
Family AA*	Single woman (late-40s) 1 child	Nigeria	Shelter 5 (not field site)	3.5	>High school, high skilled	3-year full recognition	English
UO*	Single man (late-20s)	Pakistan	Shelter 6 (not field site)	2.5	>High school, high skilled	Denial-appeal	English (phone)
EC*	Single man (early-20s)	Syria (Arab)	Private apartment	3.5	>High school, high skilled	3-year full recognition	German
MF	Single woman (early-20s)	Syria (Kurmanji Kurdish)	Private apartment	2.5	>High school	3-year full recognition	German
JY	Single man (mid-20s)	Iraq (Yazidi)	Private apartment	2	>High school, technical skilled	2-year subsidiary	English
TOTAL						28 (16 SEMI-STRUCTURED)	

Summary of semi-structured and conversational interviews conducted with refugees (families and individuals). Asterisk indicates completion of a semi-structured interview. Demographic information is based on what was reported at the time of interview. Location, legal and years (in Germany since arrival) information is based on status at point of last contact. Status change dates are in parentheses.

Appendix B: Overview of expert and non-refugee participants and interviewees

LEVEL	ACTOR / ORGANIZATION TYPE	#	
International	United Nations Refugee Agency	Documentary sources	
	European Union		
Federal (Germany)	Federal agencies (ex., BAMF, BAA, Ministry of Interior)		
	Federal government representatives		
State (NRW)	Initial reception facilities		
	State agencies (ex., Ministry of Interior*)		
	State government representatives*		
	Advocacy organizations • President, state refugee advocacy and research organization		1
Municipal (Cologne)	City government representatives (<i>Stadtverwaltung</i>) • Leader, municipal Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment • Leader and political representative, municipal Evangelical church relief efforts • City council member, The Left • City council member, The Greens		4
	City government agency officials • Leader and two staff, Cologne Mayoral Refugee Coordination Task Force • Leader, municipal Foreigners' Authority (2 interviews) • Division leader, residence permit cessation, municipal Foreigners' Authority • Leader, municipal Housing Office • Division leader, municipal Housing Office • Leader, municipal integration programs • Manager and consultant, municipal Job Center department		8
	Third-sector charity providers / contract program administrators • Leader, municipal migration services, Diakonie • Senior volunteer and services coordinator, Diakonie Michaelshoven (2 interviews) • Leader, municipal refugee social services, Red Cross • Municipal volunteer coordinator, Red Cross • Refugee program consultant, Caritas (2 individuals)	7	
	Advocacy organizations • President, municipal refugee advocacy and research organization • Leader and political advocate, Roma charity organization • Manager, migrant women charity organization	3	
	Academic researchers • Social scientist, Technische Hochschule Köln • Economist, German Economic Institute	2	
	Lawyers / legal organizations • Legal consultants, pro-bono legal organization • Immigration lawyer • Municipal ombudsperson	3	

LEVEL	ACTOR / ORGANIZATION TYPE	#
Community (District, Shelters)	Local district representatives*	0
	Social workers (shelters) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social worker, Red Cross (7 interviews, 5 individuals) • Refugee and social work assistant, Diakonie • Social worker, Diakonie 	9
	Security guards (shelters) / police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter security guard (2 individuals) • Municipal police officer 	3
	Volunteers (shelters) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer, local welcome initiative • Red Cross shelter volunteer (2 interviews) 	3
	Volunteers (community initiatives) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead political activist, Cologne Welcome Initiatives (2 interviews) • Volunteer leader, local welcome initiative 	3
	Translators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional (Farsi/Dari) translator • Refugee, university student and lay (Kurmanji) translator 	2
TOTAL		48

Summary of semi-structured interviews conducted with experts at various institutional levels. Some interviewees fit into multiple categories (ex., leader of a community volunteer initiative also worked for a charity provider). Category chosen here is based on the primary subject matter discussed in interview. The asterisk notes that representatives were contacted for interviews, but either declined invitations or did not respond to contact attempts.

Appendix C: Overview of fieldwork shelters

SHELTER	MONTHS	BUILDING	PRIVACY	BATHROOM	KITCHEN	RESIDENTS	COUNTRIES	
1	12	Wohnheim (Building 1)	Repurposed	Non-conjoined private rooms	Shared	<100	>10	
		Systembau (Building 2)	Planned	Apartment-style units (some shared)	In-unit (shared when multiple residents in unit)			In-unit (shared when multiple residents in unit)
2	5	Emergency shelter	Repurposed	Non-conjoined rooms (some shared)	Shared	Cafeteria-style	>300	>20
3	4	Container village	Temporary	Container units (some shared)	In-unit	Shared	>300	>20
4	7	Systembau	Planned	Apartment-style units (some shared)	In-unit (shared when multiple residents in unit)	In-unit (shared when multiple residents in unit)	<100	<10

Summary of shelters where ongoing observational data was gathered. All shelters were located within the same municipal district of Cologne. *Shelter* refers to the type of shelter within the city classification scheme (Appendix F). *Months* refers to the time spent in the capacity as a volunteer gathering observational data. *Building* refers to whether the shelter is an existing building repurposed to be a shelter; a temporary structure made from materials such as metal sheets or modular containers; or a semi-permanent, planned building explicitly built as an apartment-style shelter. *Privacy* refers to the extent that rooms for living are closed-off and/or shared (i.e., multiple, non-related residents in one unit). *Bathroom* refers to whether bathrooms are private within unit or facilities shared communally amongst residents. *Kitchen* refers to whether kitchens are private within unit, kitchen facilities are shared communally amongst residents or residents receive catered food in cafeteria-style food lines. *Residents* and *Countries* show ranges for the number of residents and different origin countries.

Appendix D: Overview of rights and entitlements per legal status

		RESIDENCE PERMIT	RESIDENCE RESTRICTION	WELFARE
ASYLUM SEEKER	High probability to remain (Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria)	Temporary until case adjudicated	Must live in reception center up to 24 months (usually 6 in practice); then, must remain in assigned district or city where social benefits administered, hardship transfer possible	Payments based on AsylbLG, increase to SGB II amount after 15 months per SGB XII social benefits
	Other countries			
	Safe country of origin (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal)		Must live in reception center until case adjudicated or deported	
RECOGNIZED REFUGEE	Refugee Convention/Asylum Act, Basic Law	3 years; after, settlement permit possible with reduced conditions	In NRW, must remain in assigned district or city 3 years; moving for humanitarian reasons, confirmed training or self-reliant employment possible (obligation to return if employment fails)	SGB II, child payment (<i>Kindergeld</i>), housing payment (<i>Wohngeld</i>)
	Subsidiary protection	1 year, then 2-year renewal; settlement permit after 5 years		
	Ban on deportation	1 year, then 1-year renewal; settlement permit after 5 years		
TOLERATED EPRSON	Safe country of origin (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal)	Typically 1, 3 or 6 months, but may be as short as a few days, renewed at municipal level; municipality may determine conditions or programs to offer more stable residency statuses	Must remain in district or city where social benefits are administered, hardship transfer or application for private apartment possible	Payments based on AsylbLG, increase to SGB II amount after 15 months per SGB XII social benefits
	All other countries		Must remain in district or city where social benefits are administered, hardship transfer or application for private apartment possible; restrictions do not apply with self-reliant employment	

		LABOR MARKET ACCESS	VOCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS	INTEGRATION COURSE ELIGIBILITY
ASYLUM SEEKER	High probability to remain (Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria)	After 3 months with review from municipal Foreigners' Authority and when required, federal Employment Agency	May be possible after waiting periods with approval from municipal Foreigners' Authority	Yes
	Other countries		No	Yes (only until August 2019)
	Safe country of origin (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal)		No	No
RECOGNIZED REFUGEE	Refugee Convention/Asylum Act, Basic Law	Unrestricted	Yes	Yes, obligatory
	Subsidiary protection			
	Ban on deportation	With review from municipal Foreigners' Authority	May be possible after waiting periods with approval from municipal Foreigners' Authority	Yes, with approval from BAMF
TOLERATED EPRSON	Safe country of origin (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal)	No	No; some vocational training programs may be available for school-aged youth	No
	All other countries	After 3 months with review from municipal Foreigners' Authority and when required, federal Employment Agency	May be possible after waiting periods with approval from municipal Foreigners' Authority	May be possible with approval from BAMF, often related to job / training purposes

		FAMILY REUNIFICATION	HEALTHCARE	PUBLIC SCHOOL
ASYLUM SEEKER	High probability to remain (Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria)	No	Emergency and pre-approved care; after 15 months, full access based on public insurance options per SGB XII social benefits	Not compulsory until assigned to municipality
	Other countries			
	Safe country of origin (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal)			
RECOGNIZED REFUGEE	Refugee Convention/Asylum Act, Basic Law	Yes	Full access based on public insurance options	Compulsory
	Subsidiary protection	Conditional, hardship-related		
	Ban on deportation			
TOLERATED EPRSON	Safe country of origin (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal)	No	Emergency and pre-approved care; after 15 months, full access based on public insurance options per SGB XII social benefits, but municipalities have discretion to determine denial based on legal exceptions	
	All other countries			

Simplified summary of rights, restrictions and eligibilities by legal status. Information refers to laws applicable in fieldwork time (May 2017 – May 2018). Compiled from BAMF (2017c); Flüchtlingsrat Niedersachsen (2018); Genge (2019); IQ Netzwerk Niedersachsen (2019a, 2019b); Kiziak, Sixtus and Klingholz (2019); Netzwerk Unternehmen Integrieren Flüchtlinge (2019).

Appendix E: Overview of physical presence residence limitations per legal status

	Physical Presence Limitation (<i>Residenzpflicht</i>)	Residence Requirement (<i>Wohnsitzauflage</i>)
Refers to	Individuals cannot travel temporarily outside a designated area	Individuals must maintain their place of residence within the locality where social benefits are administered
Applies to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum seekers • Tolerated persons 	Recipients of social welfare benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum seekers • Recognized refugees • Tolerated persons
Validity for	3 months after arrival in Germany <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The restriction applies to asylum seekers with low prospects to remain and from safe countries of origin until the application is adjudicated • Local authorities can lengthen duration if criminal activity suspected 	Up to 3 years from the issue of a residence permit
Confined to	State (NRW)	District or district-free city (NRW) where assigned
Employment exception	Exception theoretically possible, but access to labor market simultaneously restricted for first 3 months of stay; any employment usually confined in practice to local area due to required approval from local Foreigners' Authority	May be lifted for employment subject to social insurance taxes; individual usually obliged to return if employment fails within 3 months
Hardship exception	Local authorities evaluate applications for travel related to humanitarian or hardship purposes (AsylG, Sections 58.1-2)	Local authorities evaluate applications for transfers to live with underage children or partners (ex., AsylG, Section 50.4) or due to hardship (ex., AufenthG, Section 23)

Explanation of physical presence limitations and residence restrictions. Author translation from Netzwerk Unternehmen Integrieren Flüchtlinge (2019, p. 2), with additions from Kalkmann (2019).

Appendix F: Overview of refugee shelter types in Cologne, Germany

FACILITY	%	TYPE	TIME FRAME	BUILDING	PRIVACY	BATHROOM	KITCHEN
Emergency first reception facility (<i>Notaufnahme</i>)	3%	Emergency	Acute	Repurposed	None (open plan)	Shared	Cafeteria-style
Emergency shelter (<i>Notunterkunft</i>)	9%	Emergency	Acute	Repurposed	None (open plan)	Shared	Cafeteria-style
Temporary / overflow shelter (<i>Leichtbau</i>)	2%	Emergency	Acute	Temporary	Walls, no ceilings, no doors	Shared	Cafeteria-style
Hotel accommodation (<i>Beherbergungsbetrieb</i>)	23%	General	Temporary	Commercial	Private or shared closed rooms	In-unit or shared	In-unit or shared
Container village (<i>Mobile Wohneinheit</i>)	13%	General	Temporary	Temporary	Private or shared container units	In-unit or shared	In-unit or shared
Repurposed shelter (<i>Wohnheim</i>)	13%	General	Temporary	Repurposed	Walls, some ceilings, some doors	Shared	In-unit or shared
Purpose-built shelter (<i>Systembau</i>)	13%	General	Temporary	Planned	Private or shared closed rooms	In-unit	In-unit
Commercial housing (<i>Wohnung</i>)	24%	General	Permanent	Commercial	Private (closed)	In-unit	In-unit

Overview of refugee shelter types in Cologne. Consolidated and translated from Stadt Köln (2018c). Percent (Stadt Köln, 2018d) refers to the percentage of total refugees living in each facility sort. *Type* refers to if shelter is meant to be used for first-stage, initial accommodation upon arrival (where refugees are meant to stay no longer than three months) or general accommodation. *Time frame* refers to the intended duration of shelter and structure use. *Building* refers to whether the shelter is an existing, conventional building repurposed to be a shelter; a structure made from temporary materials such as metal sheets or modular containers; a commercial-use building; or a semi-permanent, planned building explicitly built to be a shelter. *Privacy* refers to the extent that rooms for living are open, closed-off and/or shared (i.e., multiple, non-related residents in one unit). *Bathroom* refers to whether bathrooms are private within unit or facilities shared communally amongst residents. *Kitchen* refers to whether kitchens are private within unit, kitchen facilities are shared communally amongst residents or residents receive catered food in cafeteria-style food lines.

Appendix G: Overview of relevant governance actors and descriptions of primary responsibilities

	ORGANIZATION / ACTOR	TRANSLATION	SUPPORT TYPE	PURPOSE
NON-MUNICIPAL PUBLIC AGENCIES	Bundesregierung	Federal government	Political/Legal	Enact national refugee policy
	Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees	Political/Legal	Process and adjudicate asylum claims
	Bundesamt für Arbeit	Federal Employment Office	Human Capital Material	Oversee national employment and benefits measures for asylum seekers and refugees and structure of local Job Centers
	Landesregierung	State government	Political/Legal	Formulate specific laws of provisioning for refugees where federal law permits, distribute federal funding to lower governments for provisioning
	Bezirksregierung	District government	Political/Legal Material	Manage accommodation in initial reception centers before refugees are distributed to municipalities (five governmental districts of NRW)
	Polizei Staatsschutz	Police state protection	Health/Safety	Prevent and prosecute politically motivated crime, terrorism (16 posts in NRW)
	Integration-Point	Integration Point	Human Capital	Lead and coordinate employment measures for asylum seekers as a state- and municipal-supported agency
MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS	OB Oberbürgermeisterin	Office of the Mayor	Political/Legal	Oversee mayoral functions and strategic / economic city development initiatives
	OB/1 Persönliche Referentin, Sekretariat, Reden, Förderung und Anerkennung Bürgerschaftliches Engagements (FABE)	Personal assistant, secretariat, speeches, Support and Recognition for Civic Engagement	Political/Legal Human Capital	Act as municipal government contact point for recognition and support of voluntary groups
	OB/6 Flüchtlingskoordination	Refugee Coordination Office	Political/Legal	Serve as mayoral project task force and act as a coordination point to streamline municipal refugee-related provisioning (became its own Office of Integration and Diversity in November 2018)

	ORGANIZATION / ACTOR	TRANSLATION	SUPPORT TYPE	PURPOSE
MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS	Kommunale Integrationszentrum Köln	Cologne Municipal Integration Center	Political/Legal Human Capital Social	Promote programs for educational and training opportunities for youth, along with general diversity and multiculturalism efforts within Cologne and the city government (became a sub-office of the Office of Integration and Diversity in November 2018)
	1 Allgemeine Verwaltung, Ordnung und Recht	Department for General Administration, Order and Law	Political/Legal	Oversee local district councils, traffic and safety, citizen information services and registration services
	33 Ausländeramt	Foreigners' Authority	Political/Legal	Manage conditions of residency permits, travel authorization, municipal registration; authorize relevant work permissions; coordinate deportations (became its own office and separated from the Amt für öffentliche Ordnung/Office for Public Order in May 2018)
	4 Bildung, Jugend und Sport	Department for Education, Youth and Sport	Political/Legal Human Capital Health/Safety	Oversee development matters for school education, vocational training, youth and child services and municipal sport programs
	51 Amt für Kinder, Jugend und Familie	Office for Children, Youth and Families	Political/Legal Human Capital Health/Safety	Provide general social services for children and families, emergency child protective services; oversee kindergartens and daycares, youth activities, training program grants, juvenile court matters
	5 Soziales, Integration und Umwelt	Department for Social Affairs, Integration and Environment	Material Human Capital	Oversee development matters for welfare services, integration and diversity initiatives and environmental safety
	50 Amt für Soziales und Senioren	Office for Social and Senior Affairs	Material	Administer social welfare benefits according to specific scheme directives to avoid destitution, homelessness and act in accordance with SGB XII
	502 Fachstelle Wohnen, wirtschaftliche Hilfen, Reso Dienste	Office of Housing, Economic Aid, Emergency Aid	Material	Administer cash and benefits in kind disbursements under AsylbLG scheme (sub-department of 50)

	ORGANIZATION / ACTOR	TRANSLATION	SUPPORT TYPE	PURPOSE
MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS	5000 Job Center	Job Center	Material Human Capital	Administer welfare benefits and employment support programs under SGB II scheme (local establishment of the Federal Employment Agency)
	53 Gesundheitsamt	Office for Health	Health/Safety	Oversee hygiene standards in accommodation, oversee social-psychological, mental health and sexual health services, oversee various youth health services and school requirements
	56 Amt für Wohnungswesen	Office for Housing	Shelter	Manage building, outfitting, maintenance and contracting of shelter facilities; manage shelter assignment and transfer processes
CONTRACTED CHARITABLE / NON-STATE SERVICE PROVIDERS	Deutsches Rotes Kreuz	German Red Cross	Shelter Health/Safety Human Capital Material Social	Staff and run accommodation shelters; provide a comprehensive range of material donation support, consulting services, counseling and programs across areas of health, safety/conflict management, education, job training, youth services and legal support
	Caritas		Shelter Health/Safety Human Capital Material Social	Staff and run accommodation shelters; provide a comprehensive range of material donation support, consulting services, counseling and programs across areas of health, safety/conflict management, education, job training, youth services and legal support
	Malteser Hilfsdienst	Malteser Aid Society	Health/Safety Human Capital	Administer early language courses for asylum seekers, provide networking opportunities and German "godparent" helpers, act as social service coordinators in some shelters lacking on-site personnel

	ORGANIZATION / ACTOR	TRANSLATION	SUPPORT TYPE	PURPOSE
CONTRACTED CHARITABLE / NON-STATE SERVICE PROVIDERS	Diakonie		Shelter Health/Safety Human Capital Material Social	Staff and run accommodation shelters; provide a comprehensive range of material donation support, consulting services, counseling and programs across areas of health, safety/conflict management, education, job training, youth services and legal support
	Diakonie Michaelshofen		Shelter Health/Safety Human Capital Material Social	Staff and run accommodation shelters; provide a comprehensive range of material donation support, consulting services, counseling and programs across areas of health, safety/conflict management, education, job training, youth services and legal support
	Phoenix e.V.		Human Capital Social	Promote the integration of immigrants primarily through education and employment training programs through NRW state support
	Internationaler Bund		Shelter Health/Safety Human Capital Material Social	Staff and run accommodation shelters; provide a comprehensive range of material donation support, consulting services, counseling and programs across areas of health, safety/conflict management, education, job training, youth services and legal support
	Sozialdienst Katholischer Männer / Frauen	Social Services of Catholic Men / Women		Shelter Health/Safety Human Capital Material Social

	ORGANIZATION / ACTOR	TRANSLATION	SUPPORT TYPE	PURPOSE
POLITICAL INTEREST, WORKING GROUPS	AG Bleiben	Working Group Remain	Political/Legal	Advocate for migrants' rights as association of representatives from local welcome initiatives
	AK Muslimsiche Flüchtlingshilfe	Working Group Muslim Refugee Help	Political/Legal	Engage as experts with municipal leaders as association of representatives from various Islamic-interest organizations
	AK Politik	Working Group Policy	Political/Legal	Focus on refugee-related political advocacy and lobbying at the municipal and state level as association of representatives from local welcome initiatives
	Ausschuss Soziales und Senioren	Committee for Social and Senior Affairs	Political/Legal	Discuss, promote, vote on and act as primary approvers on matters of refugee-related municipal policy and funding as city-council committee
	Integrationsrat	Integration Council	Political/Legal	Discuss migration-related issues in a political development capacity as elected and appointed members of a city-council special interest group
	Stadtteilkonferenzen, örtliche Arbeitskreise	City district citizen forums	Political/Legal	Gather local residents to discuss sociopolitical issues of concern through community-based civic engagement associations and activities

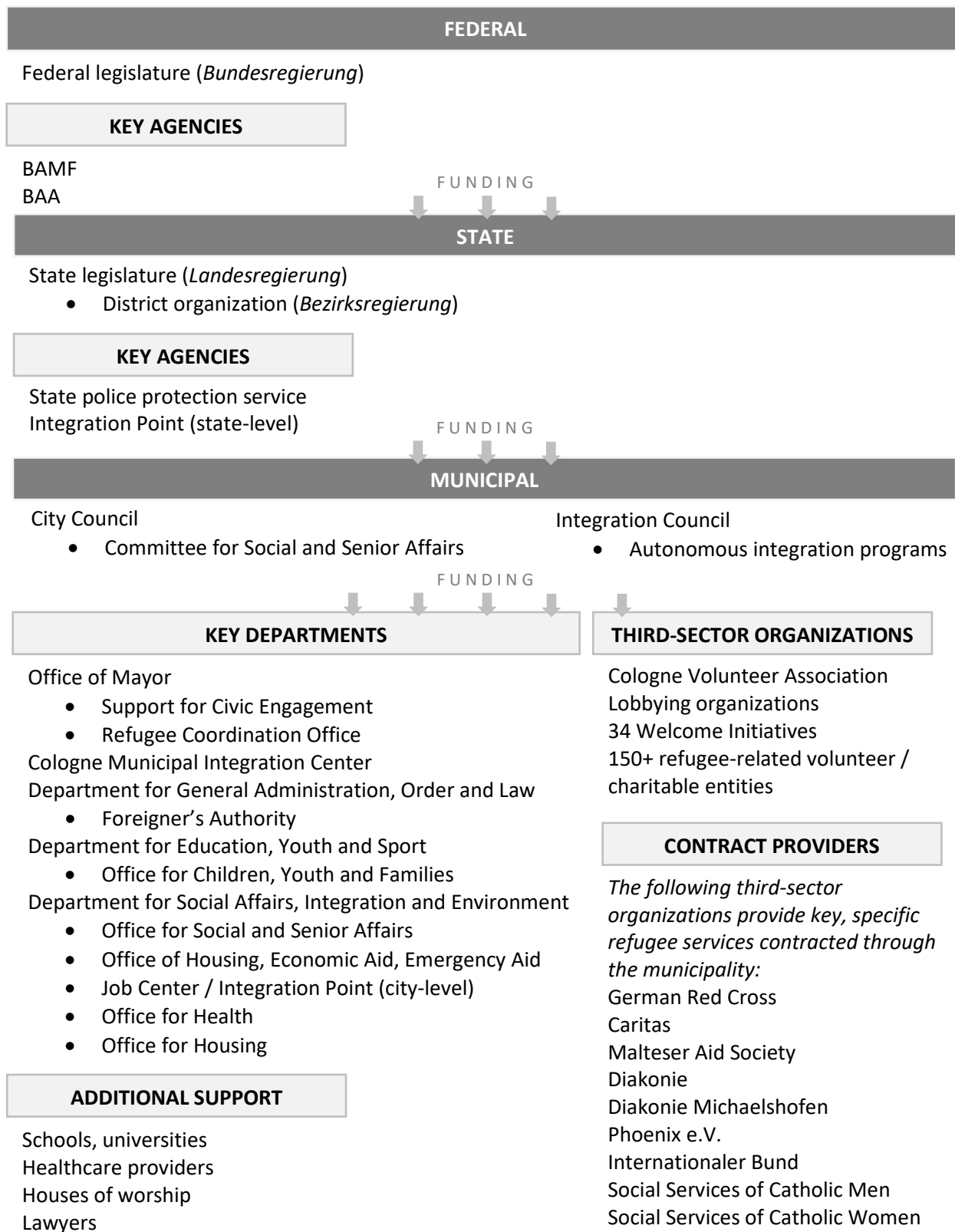
HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS	Clinics, outpatient care centers, hospitals		Health/Safety	Provide healthcare based on public health insurance entitlements and municipal approvals (when relevant)
	Gesundheitszentrum für Migrantinnen und Migranten Köln	Health Center for Migrants Cologne	Health/Safety	Provide outpatient psychiatric care and consultations for accessing healthcare (one of five state social psychiatric centers in NRW)
	Sozialpädiatrische Zentrum	Social pediatric care centers	Health/Safety	Treat social, psychological or neurological disorders in children

	ORGANIZATION / ACTOR	TRANSLATION	SUPPORT TYPE	PURPOSE
ASSOCIATIONS, VOLUNTEER INITIATIVES, CONSULTATION ORGANIZATIONS	Kölner Freiwilligen Agentur e.V.	Cologne Volunteer Association	Material Social Human Capital	Promote and organize civic engagement in the city as primary volunteer placement and development association
	Willkommensinitiativen	Welcome Initiatives	Material Social Human Capital	34 locality-based volunteer groups, grouped under the Cologne-wide initiative Wikku Köln, that coordinate volunteer programs and donations for refugees in shelters within specific communities or neighborhoods
	City-based volunteer groups, clubs, initiatives, interest organizations		Material Social Human Capital	150+ volunteer / charitable entities that provide programs, support or services offerings to refugees (often from specific ethnic or needs groups) in the form of German language learning, coordination / case liaising or consultation, sports activities, networking opportunities, excursions, job search support, job / skills training, hobby activities, school tutoring, youth / children's services, donation management and godparent / family partnerships

OTHER, MISCELLANEOUS	Language course providers		Human Capital	Administer official language integration courses and private language instruction
	Lawyers		Political/Legal	Advise on legal case, file case decision appeals
	Mosques, temples, churches, religious groups		Material, Social	Provide localized material services, donations, networking opportunities
	Security firms		Health/Safety	Monitor shelters for safety and security per municipal contracts
	Schools, childcare centers		Human Capital	Provide daycare and child education services
	Universities, vocational schools, continuation schools		Human Capital	Provide adult education, formal training services

Summary of key organizations and actors involved in the governance and provisioning of refugees in Cologne. Based on a power point presentation (*Belegungsmanagement: Grundlagen, Ziele und Umsetzung, Rundertisch für Flüchtlingsfragen, 30.06.2017*) discussed in interview with the division leader of the municipal housing office (October 30, 2017) and agency web sites.

Appendix H: Organizational chart of relevant governance actors



Organization of key actors involved in the governance and provisioning of refugees in Cologne. Based on a power point presentation (*Belegungsmanagement: Grundlagen, Ziele und Umsetzung, Rundertisch für Flüchtlingsfragen, 30.06.2017*) discussed in interview with the division leader of the municipal housing office (October 30, 2017) and agency web sites.

Appendix I: Organizational chart of municipal government during the fieldwork period

Municipal organizational chart of all city government departments and sub-departments, as structured during the fieldwork period between May 2017 and May 2018. Downloaded May 2018 from the website of Stadt Köln: <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/politik-und-verwaltung/dezernate/index.html>.

Figure follows on the next page.

Appendix J: Interview questions, refugees

Personal and warm-up questions

When did you arrive in Germany?

How long have you been in this camp?

- In what other camps have you lived in while in Germany? Where and for how long?

What country did you migrate from?

How old are you?

Do you have any other relatives living in Germany? Which ones?

What did you work as in the past? What school / training / studies do you have?

If you know, what legal status did you receive from the Foreigners' Authority?

- 1 year (subsidiary protection)
- 2 year (subsidiary protection)
- 3 year (full recognition)
- Toleration (Duldung; 1, 3 or 6 months, other)
- Asylum seeker (waiting for an application decision)
- Denial (waiting for an appeal or deciding how to proceed)

How long did you have to wait for this status?

When did you receive your most recent status?

Community characteristics and qualities, relationships

How do you feel your life is here in the shelter (safe, threatened, constrained, boring, ...)?

How do you spend a normal day (here in the shelter)?

What do you like about the area where this shelter is (transport connections, shopping possibilities, free-time activities, school/training opportunities, neighbors, ...)?

Do you have friends here in the shelter? Outside the shelter?

- How did you meet them?

Who works here in the shelter? What are their tasks?

Livelihood characteristics and qualities, resources, needs

What do you find difficult in your daily life in Germany? What do you lack?

- What do you need, but you cannot get?

What do you like to buy or get by yourself (food, clothing, hygiene articles, ...)? Where do you get it from?

- Do you receive anything else for free? From where?

From where do you receive your money to live on?

- Your own work
 - Where do you work?
 - How did you find your work?
 - Are you satisfied with your work?
- Government (Job Center, Social Services)
- Charitable organization
- Family

What possibilities do you have to better your circumstances, in the shelter or generally (German courses, orientation courses, training opportunities, sport, skills courses or activities, health education, ...)?

- Do you participate in these programs?
- Do you find these opportunities useful or not useful?

Where do you receive information about things or services that you need or things that interest you personally?

Active rules

What rules do you have to follow in your daily lives, especially here in the shelter? Can you list all that you can think of?

- Who made these rules (the government, security officers, the office, the shelter organization, other residents, ...)?

What are you allowed to do or prohibited from doing with your legal status?

How do you learn these rules (read them, somebody explains them, everybody just does them, ...)?

What happens if you do not follow a rule?

What rules do you think are useful and not useful in your daily life?

Areas for action: situations, processes, execution

What conflicts are there in this shelter?

What helps the most to solve conflicts here (rules, the office, the police, security officers, partnerships or friendships with others, avoiding interaction, intervening yourself, ...)?

When you need help with the following types of things, where do you go or whom do you ask (the office, security officers, a government agency, an organization, friends, other residents, families, the Internet, ...)?

- Documents, legal status, legal questions
- Childcare, schooling
- Work, training, free-time activity programs
- Problems with your living space
- Personal problems (health, money, familial issues, food, ...)

What problems in your daily life have you been able to solve? How? What still feels challenging to you? Why?

Results: evaluating, assessing, goal setting

Is life better or worse for you now than when you arrived in this shelter? Why?

- What do you have now, that you didn't have before? / What is different?

What would you change about your living situation in the future?

- Have you tried to change this already? Do you think it is possible to change this?

Are you satisfied with your legal status? Do you feel "OK" about it or do you wish for something different?

- What would you like to do differently, if you had a different legal status (receive different state benefits, undertake different activities, ...)?

What would you change about Germany?

Who is (or should be) responsible for improving your life in Germany?

- What do you need to be self-reliant and independent?

What do you think about your future in Germany?

- Will life get better or worse?
- Do you feel hopeful or pessimistic?

Do you think you will one day be happy or satisfied with your life in Germany?

Appendix K: Interview questions, experts

Personal and warm-up questions

Tell me about yourself and your professional background.

- How did you come to work in this position?

How did you come to your interest in refugee issues and work?

How do you find the general refugee situation (in Cologne, in Germany)?

Offers of the organization

What are the specific tasks of this organization?

- *Agency specific:* How is this organization different from ... [ex., other related organizations, other government agencies]?
- *Agency specific:* Can you explain the specific process of ... [ex., determining work authorization, adjudicating deportation appeals, arranging shelter transfers]?

In your opinion, which of the offers or tasks of the organization are the most important? The most useful?

- Do refugees agree with this? When they come here, what are they looking for mainly?

Agency specific: About how many refugees come here in a month? What types of refugees?

How do refugees hear about this organization and the offers?

How does this organization coordinate with other agencies [ex., government] or organizations [ex., charities, civil society groups] in Cologne? How does this coordination function?

Refugee politics in Cologne

Which agencies or organizations are the most important actors with regards to policy, rights and the life of refugees in Cologne?

Which laws, policies or processes (in Cologne and/or the state) function very well? What are the specific results of these good policies?

- Is there a specific success story you can share from this organization with regards to how it helped refugees?

What are the biggest gaps, failings or missteps regarding refugee policy (in Cologne and/or the state)?

How do these policy failings specifically effect or manifest themselves in the daily lives of refugees?

Do you believe refugees have the agency to solve their own problems independently in daily life?

- When no, what do they need for more independence?

Who should be responsible for the life and future of refugees?

When you could write the laws yourself, what would the ideal laws or policies be to promote the optimal care, integration and rights of refugees?

Closing and referral sampling

Are there any other topics or information that we should talk about? Do you want to add anything?

Is there anybody else you can recommend for an interview, either in this organization or in another important organization?

Appendix L: Interview questions, shelter workers

Personal and warm-up questions

Tell me about yourself and your professional background.

- How did you come to work in this position?

How did you come to your interest in refugee issues and work?

What are your main tasks (here in the shelter)? Which is the most important?

Community characteristics and qualities, relationships

Can you share a brief background about this shelter (how many residents, what types of residents, how was the shelter established, ...)?

- What was the attitude of the local government regarding this shelter? And the attitude of the local residents? Have these attitudes changed?

What is the role of the shelter in terms of meeting the care and needs of the refugees? And the role of the shelter-managing organization?

In what situations do refugees come to you for specific help?

Who else works here? What are their tasks?

How do refugees feel life is here in the shelter (safe, threatened, constrained, boring, ...)?

What do refugees like about the area where this shelter is (transport connections, shopping possibilities, free-time activities, school/training opportunities, neighbors, ...)?

Livelihood characteristics and qualities, resources, needs

What do refugees find difficult in their daily lives in Germany? What do they lack?

- What do they do, when they need something, but cannot get it?

From where do most refugees here receive money to live on?

- Their own work
- Government (Job Center, Social Services)
- Charitable organization
- Family

What must refugees buy or get by themselves (food, clothing, hygiene, ...)? What does the shelter provide?

What possibilities do refugees have to better their circumstances, in the shelter or generally (German courses, orientation courses, training opportunities, sport, skills courses, health education, ...)?

- Do they participate in these programs?
- Do they find these opportunities useful or not useful?

Active rules

What rules do refugees have to follow in their daily lives, especially here in the shelter? Can you list all that you can think of?

- Who made these rules (the government, security officers, the office, the shelter organization, other residents, ...)?
- Who should make these rules?

How do refugees learn these rules (read them, somebody explains them, everybody just does them, ...)?

What happens if residents do not follow a rule?

What specific organization rules or policies influence your own position? Government laws or policies?

What rules do you think are useful and not useful?

Areas for action: situations, processes, execution

What conflicts are there in this shelter?

What helps the most to solve conflicts here (rules, the police, security officers, partnerships between residents, intervening yourself, ...)?

How do residents in the shelter help each other? Do they create internal friendships?

What happens when a resident wants to complain about a problem?

Results: evaluating, assessing, goal setting

What would you change about this shelter in the future? About the rules or management of your organization?

What would you change about relevant policies or laws in Germany?

- What are the biggest gaps, failings or missteps?

Who should be responsible for the life and future of refugees?

Do you believe refugees have the agency to solve their own problems independently in daily life?

- When no, what do they need for more independence?

What do you think about the future for refugees in Germany?

- Will their lives get better or worse?
- How can your organization help with this?