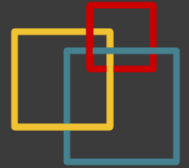# Immigration from Iran to Germany: Streamlining the Process with Web Tools

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Abstract

Germany has a long history of refugee resettlement. The number of global refugees has been on the rise for a while, most recently with events such as the Syrian Civil War, the Arab Spring, and the Ukraine-Russia War. Germany has been taking in a large number of refugees in reflection of this influx. In the wake of the civil unrest in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, we anticipate a large influx of Iranian asylum seekers to Germany given the precedent of immigration from Iran to Europe[1]. Iran has been one of the top ten refugee-sending countries to Germany for over a decade[2]. With this continual increase of refugees arriving in Germany, we were left with the question: how do newly arrived refugees find the resources and support they need to thrive in their new home?

The following paper explores this question through a mixed-methods study to understand the refugee resettlement process and access to resources and information in Germany. Our research primarily consisted of interviews with refugees and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Germany and content analysis on past studies, such as Berlin's history with refugees and protests in the Middle East, to gain insight into the most difficult aspects of the asylum-seeking process. The most urgent categories of assistance to be included on our website were legal, social service, and community building. From our interviews with refugees, we identified that there were lots of helpful legal and social resources, but they were all very scattered. Despite the abundance of useful tools, many were difficult to find, limiting the amount of help they could provide. The solution we found and implemented is a web tool that provides a centralized location for legal and social assistance to refugees.

Asylum Seeking in Germany: Barriers to Entry

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that conflicts across the globe have increased the number of refugees over the last decade, with Germany granting asylum to a significant portion of this population[3]. The global change in refugees across the world can be seen in Figure 1. For technical differences between refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants refer to Figure 7 in the Methodology section.

In addition to the global increase in refugees, burgeoning domestic unrest could prove to exacerbate the pressure on countries who receive refugees[4]. With the current unrest in Iran, for instance, many people are now seeking asylum in Germany. They are challenged to navigate the system and find a way to live in a new country. The German asylum-seeking process is long and confusing, especially for people who do not speak German. Much of the process is in person and on paper, which makes it harder for refugees to track their progress.

Our group had three primary objectives when crafting our project deliverable. The first

89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2021 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order.
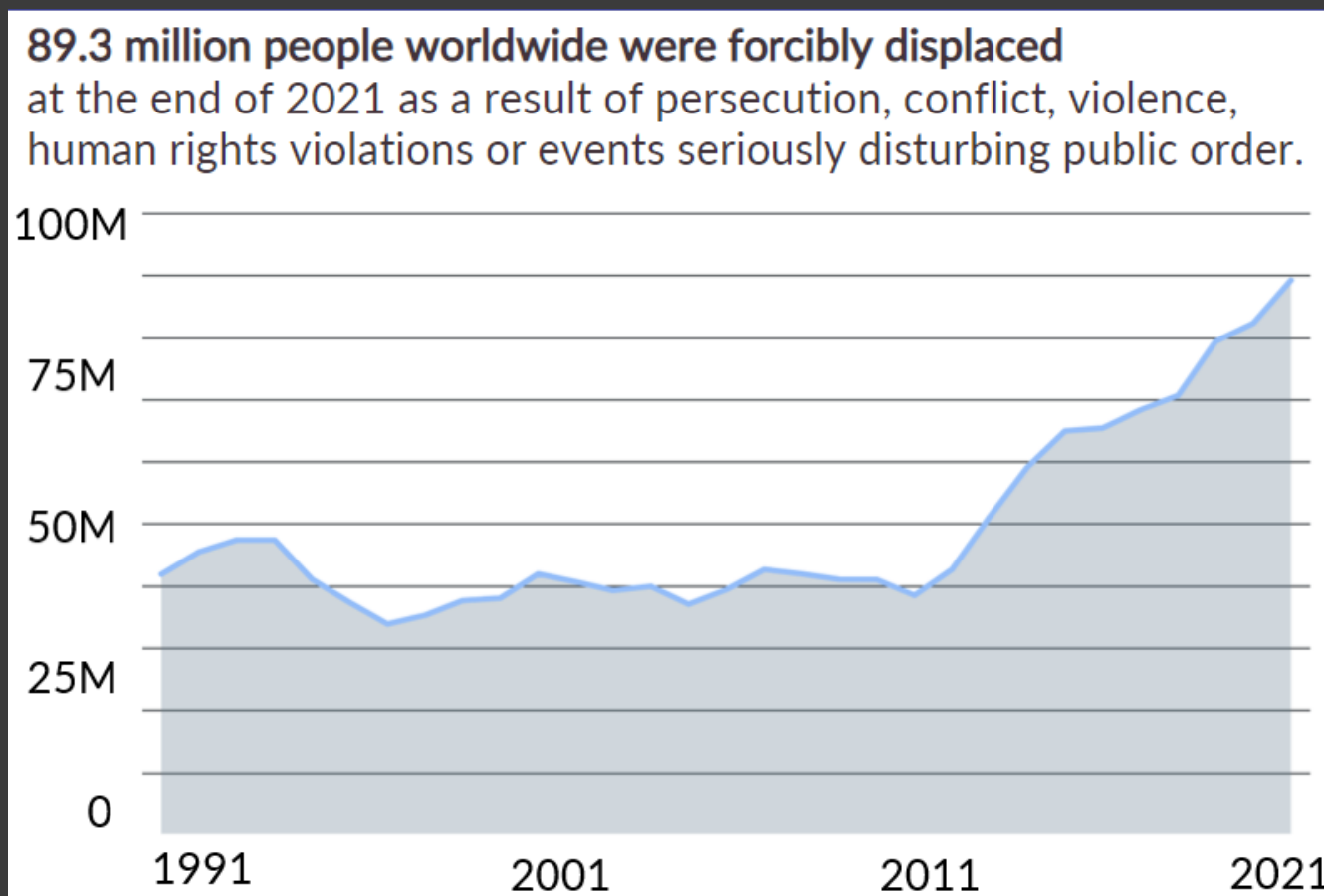
Figure 1: Worldwide volume of refugees over time.

Note. From UNHCR Global Trends 2021[3].

was to find pre-existing resources focused on helping refugees and identify what they provided and what they lacked. We would then aggregate helpful links to fill in these gaps on our site. Our second objective was to create a website template that could be easily adapted by future groups. Our sponsor plans to build a larger website with pages for each country sending to Germany, all of which will use our template. Our final objective was to research ways that technology could make a difference in regards to social services, like finding a job or housing, and finding a community once in Germany.

The importance of our project is to resolve several issues presented in the asylum-seeking process in Germany. This mainly involves finding and collecting much of the already available data. We then developed the information into an easily-expandable website. This website contains generic help that is applicable to all refugees as well as Iran-specific help like a translation into Farsi, the official language of Iran. This website acts as a template that can be applied to other projects of a similar scope. If a new NGO would like to make a website about asylum seeking for Iraq, they could use our website and designs as a blueprint in order to make it. This helps future projects learn from our mistakes, and build upon the pre-existing resources we have collected for our website.

The consequences of our project will be helping refugees and furthering the collective impact framework. The collective impact framework will be furthered through consolidating the information on our website allowing for a mutual reinforcement between different NGOs. Further discussion on collective impact in relation to our project and other NGOs is contained within the background section. The website also removes several barriers of entry to asylum seekers who do not know German or know where to begin the process.

Germany's Asylum-Seeking Process: Context and Improvement

It is first important to distinguish between asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants. These are all very similar statuses, but they are not interchangeable. An asylum seeker is an individual who has fled from a country, likely meets refugee criteria, and is in the process of applying for asylum in a country but has not yet received it. A refugee is an individual who has legally applied for asylum, which the receiving country has successfully granted. This status provides them with access to legal and social support. An immigrant is similar to a refugee in that they are an individual with legal permission to reside within a country; however, the key difference is that an immigrant willingly chose to come to the country. For a visual representation of this, see Figure 2.

Germany's recent policies regarding asylum seeking allowed the country to become a new home to a wide array of refugees. Throughout the long history of refugees in the country, asylum seekers coming to Germany have encountered various difficulties. Following World War II, Germany experienced a large influx of refugees from Eastern Europe. In contrast, modern day immigration to Germany consists of asylum seekers and immigrants coming from Middle Eastern countries and Ukraine. The Ukrainian conflict caused a large humanitarian crisis, forcing many citizens out of their homes. This has led to European countries, such as Germany, to take in an increasing number of refugees.

Immigration to Germany escalated as the post-war economy caused the need for workers to increase. From data compiled by
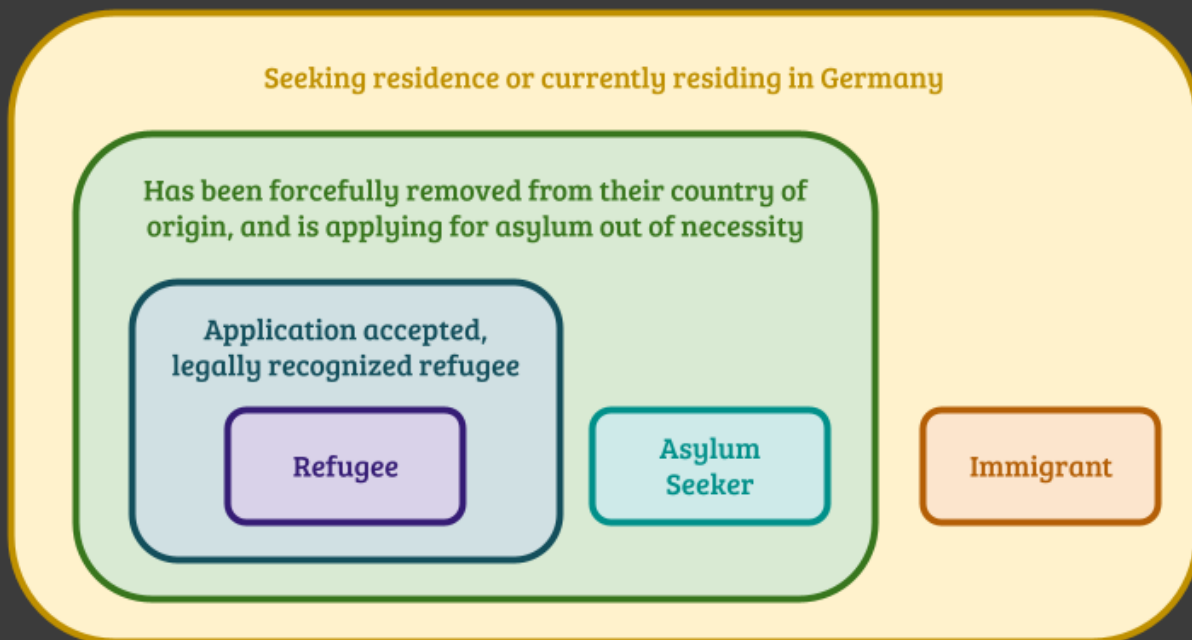

Figure 2: Status distinction for those seeking residence in Germany.

Statista, Germany as a whole has a foreign population of 13.1% as of 2021, increasing from roughly 8%, a number which held relatively constant before the 2015 refugee crisis[5]. The immigration process to Germany evolved over the country's history, and with the current refugee crisis, now is the time for the process to be streamlined.

The History of Asylum Seeking in Germany

After WWII, millions of refugees emigrated from Eastern Europe to West and East Germany. Bringing in immigrants was a potential solution to the following labor shortage. The Deutsche Welle states that West Germany signed an agreement with Turkey in 1961 to allow guest workers to come to Germany to work[6]. The West German government saw this as an opportunity to grow the economy, not the population, and expected the temporary guest workers to return to Turkey after their stay. In "Germany: A Changing Country of Immigration", Green claims a large number of the Turkish immigrants stayed in Germany, but in 1973, the West German government put a stop to immigrants coming for work[7]. The reunification of Germany in 1990 led to another large increase in immigration to Germany.

Figure 3: Non-national population of Germany, 1968-2010.

Note. From "Germany: A Changing Country of Immigration" by Green, S., 2013, *German Politics* (p. 335)[7].

Figure 3 represents the non-national population of Germany between 1968 to 2010. The figure displays the various growths and declines in immigration throughout Germany's history. Germany now faces the repercussions of a refugee crisis happening over the world.

The Current Refugee Crisis

Historically, Germany has been one of the top countries for refugees seeking asylum. Now, the number of refugees around the world is increasing. For countries like Germany, which take in many refugees, this upsurge could cause a logistical problem. The total number of refugees has doubled over the last decade. According to UNHCR, in 2011, there was a total number of 38.54 million people displaced worldwide and in 2021, this number increased to 89.32 million[3]. This is a direct effect of revolution, unrest, and conflict in areas such as the Middle East and Eastern Europe. UNHCR identifies the catalyst for the increase as the beginning of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in 2011, with over 6 million refugees being housed worldwide as of 2022[8]. UNHCR states that Germany hosts over 500 thousand Syrian refugees, hosting over 70% of the Syrian refugees in Europe[9].

The burden of refugee resettlement in Germany increased over the last year. The conflict in Ukraine forced millions of people to leave their homes and flee to other countries. Eight million Ukrainians pursued refuge in Europe, with 13% of refugees ending up in Germany. UNHCR reported that there were 1,021,667 refugees from Ukraine in Germany as of January 17th, 2023[10]. Politico reported that Ukrainian refugees were often omitted from migration statistics, because the European Union (EU) granted Ukrainian refugees a unique

status[11]. Overall, the high influx of refugees has placed increasing stress on Germany's immigration process.

Iran is often overlooked when discussing asylum seekers in Germany, despite being in the top ten sending countries to Germany for over a decade[2]. Furthermore, asylum seekers coming to Germany are likely already under immense stress and having to navigate the German legal process is yet another challenge they must face. While a lot of information is readily available through official or NGOs sources, it is often difficult to find and understand. This is why centralizing the information to help refugees and asylum seekers is so important. On September 16th, 2022 country wide protests started in Iran over the death of Mahsa Amini. The Guardian reported that Iran's morality police arrested Mahsa Amini for not following the women's Islamic Dress Code, and she died in police custody[12]. These protests are some of the largest protests since the 1979 revolution and may cause a similarly large influx of asylum seekers. Providing a tool that not only simplifies the asylum-seeking process but provides links to other general resources would benefit all future Iranians looking to come to Germany.

Looking to the past, Chaichian explains in "The New Phase of Globalization and Brain Drain" that civil unrest following the Iranian Revolution in 1979 led to an increase in immigration to Europe, and specifically Germany[13]. We anticipate that these recent protests may lead to a similar increase in immigration to Europe.

Iran has a long history of emigration to Germany and other European countries. The 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in many Iranians seeking asylum, and Chaichian reported that most traveled to the U.S. and

Europe[13]. The years following the revolution led to Iranians seeking asylum from the execution and arrest of political opponents by the new government. In 2022, Iran continues to rank as a top ten country of origin for asylum seekers to Germany.

The German Asylum-Seeking Process

Potential asylum seekers must follow a specific asylum-seeking process as outlined by the UNHCR. An asylum seeker must (1) be at risk of political persecution upon returning to their home country, (2) travel to Germany via a non-overland route (boat, plane, etc.), and (3) not be from member states of the EU, Norway, or Switzerland, as these are considered to be safe third countries. If one fulfills all of these requirements, they will automatically receive a residence permit and have permission to live and work in Germany for three years. The UNHCR website states that Germany's Federal Office automatically renews residence permits for refugees after three years if required[15].

The Federal Office can also grant subsidiary protection if there is a risk of serious harm or human rights violations upon returning to their home country. Examples include the death penalty, torture, inhumane treatment or punishment, or armed conflict like war. In the case of subsidiary protection, individuals receive a residence permit for at least one year and a possible two-year extension if the situation in their home country does not improve. Lastly, the UNHCR website states that people with other outstanding reasons like suffering from a serious illness, or others of equal severity, may acquire a one-year residence permit with the possibility of renewal[14].
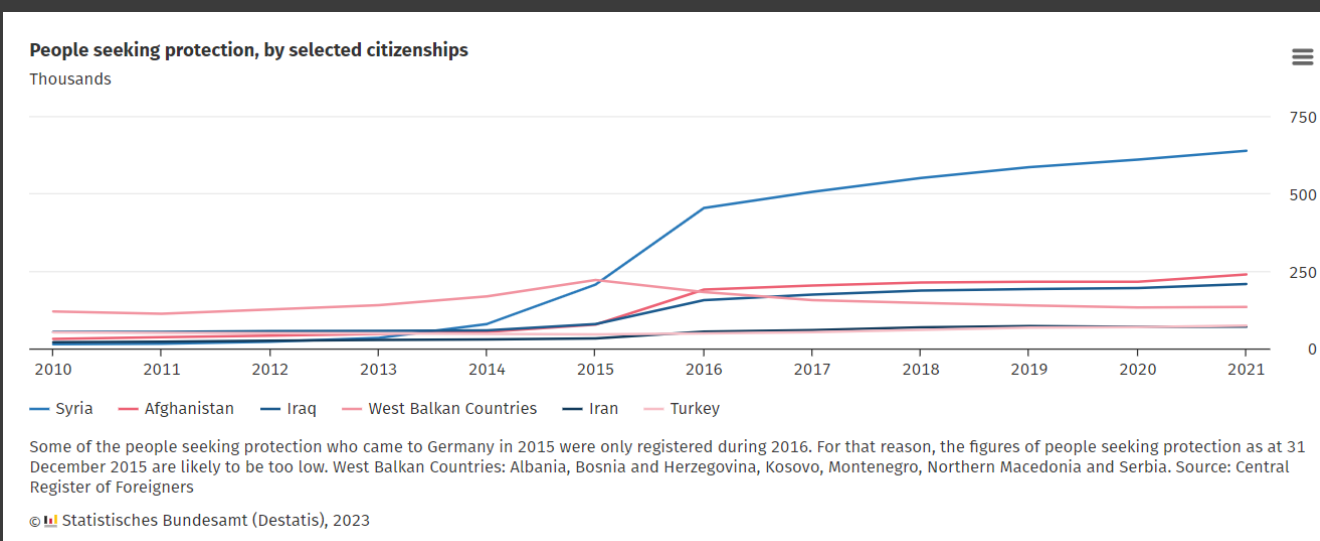

People seeking protection, by selected citizenships
Thousands

Legend: — Syria — Afghanistan — Iraq — West Balkan Countries — Iran — Turkey

Some of the people seeking protection who came to Germany in 2015 were only registered during 2016. For that reason, the figures of people seeking protection as at 31 December 2015 are likely to be too low. West Balkan Countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Serbia. Source: Central Register of Foreigners

© Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), 2023

Figure 4: People seeking protection, by selected citizenships.

Note. From Migration and integration, by Federal Statistical Office (Destatis), n.d.[2]

Demographics and Culture

To better tailor our web tool to incoming refugees, we considered the demographics and culture of the incoming people. What languages do refugees speak? What is their religion? What is the age of most of the refugees? This influences what tools will be most helpful in our final product. Each tool will be relevant depending on the demographics of the incoming people.

Around a quarter million new asylum seekers came to Germany in 2022, as well as an additional 1 million refugees from Ukraine. Sanderson reported in "Asylum Applications in Germany on the Rise" that the majority of the asylum seekers in 2022 came from countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria [15]. Iran was also among the top ten sending countries of refugees to Germany. The culture of these sending countries is different, and it uniquely affects their integration process after they arrive in Germany.

Figure 4 shows the breakdown of refugees currently living in Germany as of 2021, not including any refugees from 2022. Many of the refugees are from Syria, with 640 thousand refugees of Syrian origin. The German Federal Statistical Office reported that 70 thousand of the refugees are from Iran[2].

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of new asylum seekers in 2022 by age and gender. Statista reported that about one-third of new asylum seekers in Germany in 2022 are women, with the remaining two-thirds being men[16]. The Harvard International Review stated that refugees that arrive alone are more likely to be men, so the women that do arrive often arrive with their families, husbands, and children[17]. Looking at a
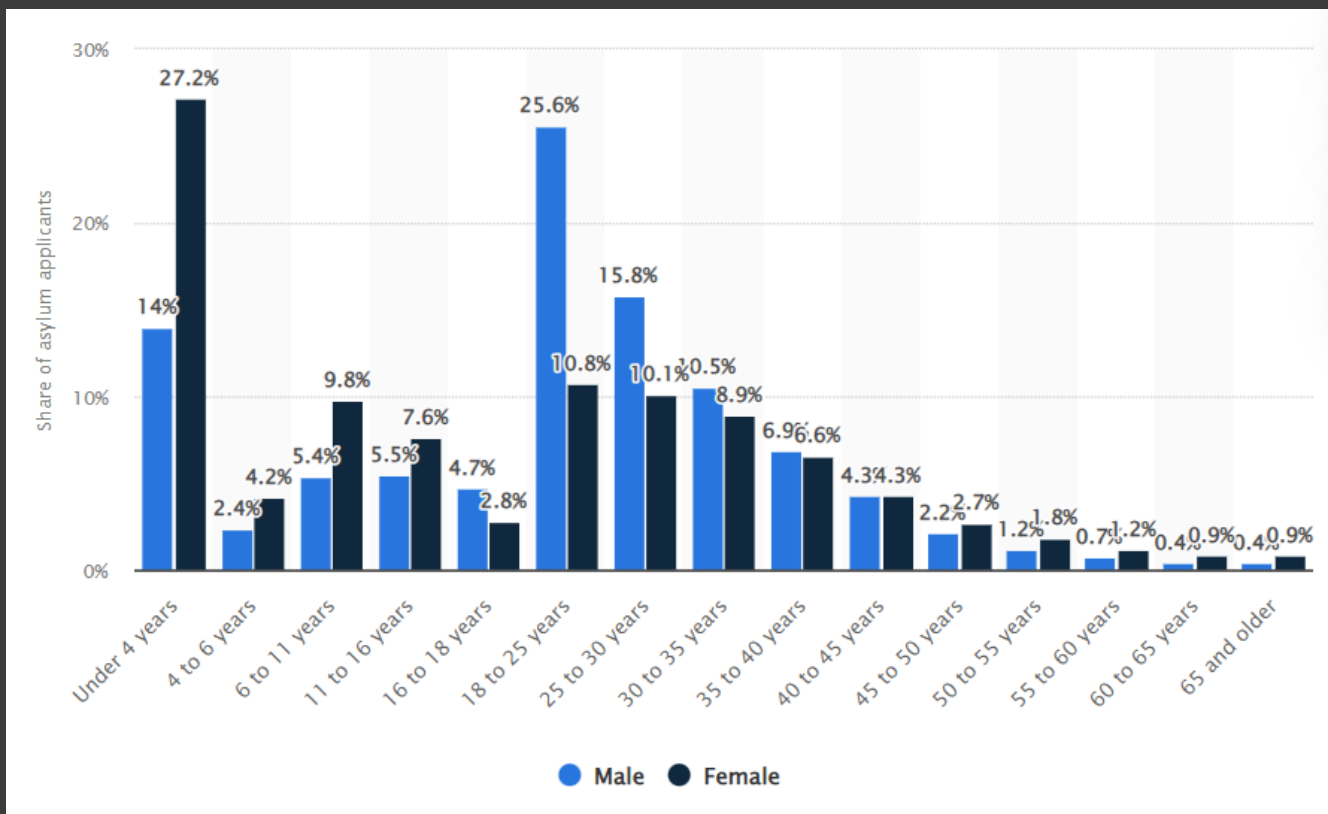

Figure 5: Share of first-time male and female asylum applicants in Germany in 2022, by age.

Note. From BAMF, 2022, in Statista[17].

gender breakdown may help to better provide gender-specific care to groups of immigrants. Most of the incoming refugees are of working age, increasing the working percentage of Germany's population. There are also a lot of children among the incoming refugees. This makes job-seeking and school-finding key goals for successful integration.

There are many languages spoken among incoming refugees, with Arabic, Persian, and Kurdish being among the most spoken languages. There are also differences in dialects spoken between various regions within countries of origin. Holzer explained in the paper, "Language Biographies and Multilingual Language Use," that refugees from Iran speak several dialects, with Farsi, Dari, and Hazaragi being popular, as well as Urdu and Arabic as peripheral languages[18]. Bathke reported in their article, "Integration Courses in Germany: What are they, and who can take part?," that the German government provides refugees with mandatory German language and integration classes, as of the Immigration Act in 2005[19]. The German Federal Ministry states that to become a full citizen, refugees must have a B1 level of proficiency in German, further complicating the immigration process[20].

Loho states in her article, "Germany's Growing Muslim Population is Now More Diverse, Says New Study," that the leading religion of incoming refugees is Islam, with Muslims now accounting for an estimated 6% of all Germans, which makes Islam the second leading religion in Germany after Christianity [21]. According to the U.S. State Department reports from April 2021, roughly 74% of Muslims in Germany are Sunni, with another 8% are Alevi, 4% Shia, and the remaining are of other affiliations[22]. Finding a place of worship is an important aspect for German immigrants.

The aforementioned differences were important to consider when developing our web tool, in order to facilitate the needs of immigrants coming from many cultural backgrounds. We kept them in mind during the interview process and while selecting what tools to include and focus on.

Collective Impact

Collective impact is an important framing for our work, as it outlines how many stakeholders can work together through a unified process to affect positive change. The creators of collective impact, Kania and Kramer, asserted that, "successful collective impact initiatives often assure five conditions that are associated with their relative success"[23]. The five conditions are common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforced activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. Our project connects to each of these conditions of the collective impact model. These are displayed in Figure 6. We fulfill the first condition by having every NGO displayed on our website with the same goal. Many different NGOs and volunteers are moving towards the goal of making the German asylum process easier for refugees, but are not actively cooperating. Because of this, NGOs have several different websites and outreach programs to help refugees, regarding various aspects of the asylum process. We also exemplify the next two conditions, shared measurement and mutually reinforced activities. Shared measurement is shown through the template for future websites. The template explains what base features an NGO website would need to contain to adequately help refugees, creating
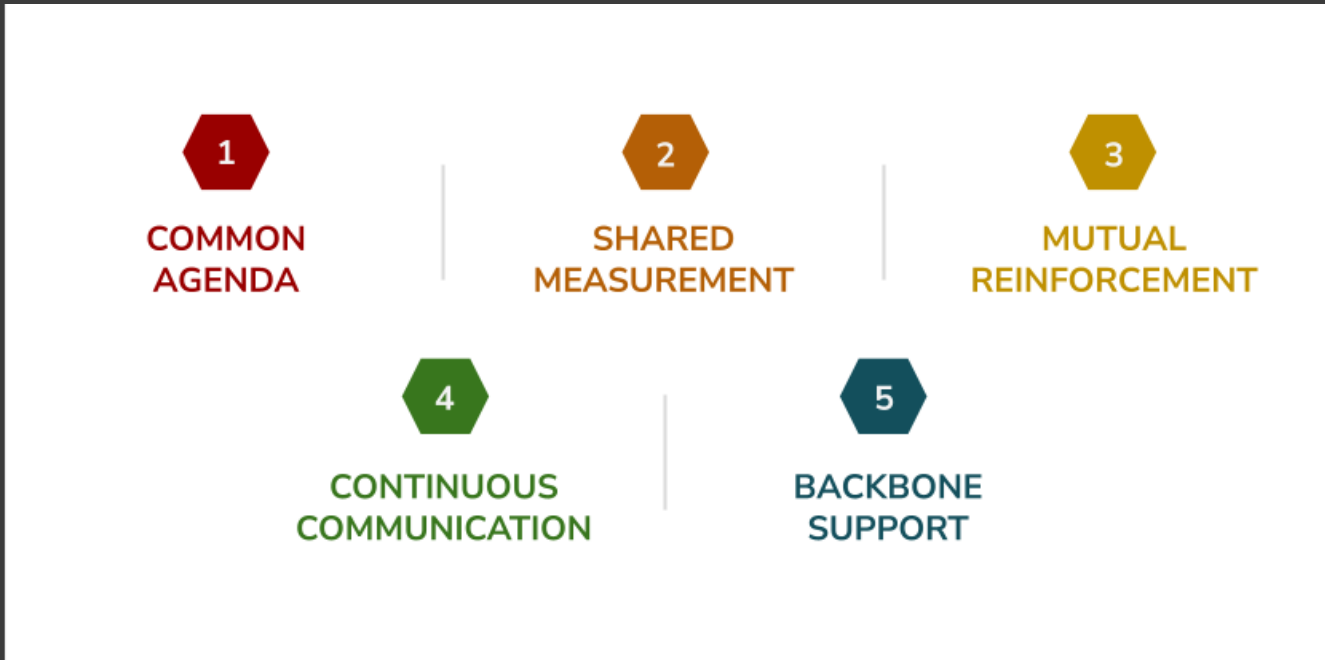
Figure 6: Attributes of collective impact.

a baseline measure of quality. The template shows the right approach for making a website, and serves as a backbone support service NGOs can reference. Reinforced activities are shown by linking to NGOs and volunteers on our website and through our community forum. Mutual reinforcement is shown on our website, where we display different categories of NGOs that all are in service of the same mission. Our community forum represents the last two conditions, continuous communication and backbone support. The community forum contains open communication and support from people associated with our project, and an NGO could maintain it. Our website acts as a good first step for a collective impact effort, where NGOs and volunteers are all working towards the same goal.

Improving the Fundamentals of the Asylum-Seeking Process

Germany has deep historical ties to immigration, with policies that allowed or inhibited immigration over time. Germany had several large waves of asylum seekers throughout its history and is currently taking in thousands of refugees from Ukraine. The war in Ukraine shows the importance of setting up and maintaining infrastructure for refugees. It is essential, as shown by rising immigration, that European countries should streamline the process of immigration. Germany can be a leading example in ease of immigration through an efficient but fast immigration process.

The goal of our research was to determine how a collective impact resource can help the communication and coordination of services for asylum seekers and refugees. This resource can also streamline the asylum process to best help Iranian refugees.

The primary objectives of our project are defined by the following research questions:

1. What resources already exist to support the transition of refugees first arriving in Germany? What are the gaps in said resources?

2. How are we going to make our project expandable for future teams in terms of design and curated content?

3. How can technology support refugee resettlement in terms of social services, human security, and community building?

We conducted mixed-methods interviewing and content analysis to guide our web tool implementation. We used the information to develop a priority queue for different features to focus on, to create a more efficient and effective web tool for users.

Methods

We conducted mixed-methods research by interviewing NGOs and refugees, as well as analyzing the pre-existing resources available to refugees. The goal of the interviews was to collect information and historical context, as well as define legal obstacles to the immigration process in Germany. A summary of the methodology used in this project is represented by Figure 7.

Interviewing NGOs

We interviewed NGOs regarding their experience working with refugees and insight regarding asylum-seeking in Germany. Through the interviews, we identified the greatest challenges that refugees face while entering the country. NGOs have pre-existing contacts and resources for refugees, which we referenced while writing our report. The NGOs also shared how their organizations provide support to refugees, which helped to identify what information we included on our website. Individual NGO interview questions are listed in Appendix A. A breakdown of these interviews and their content is located in Data Analysis.

Interviewing Asylum Seekers and Refugees

We conducted interviews with refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Iran. At least two members of our group conducted each of these interviews, with at least one person taking notes throughout the interview. We started each interview with a brief introduction to our project. This includes a statement on how we plan to use the information gathered in the interview. Next,
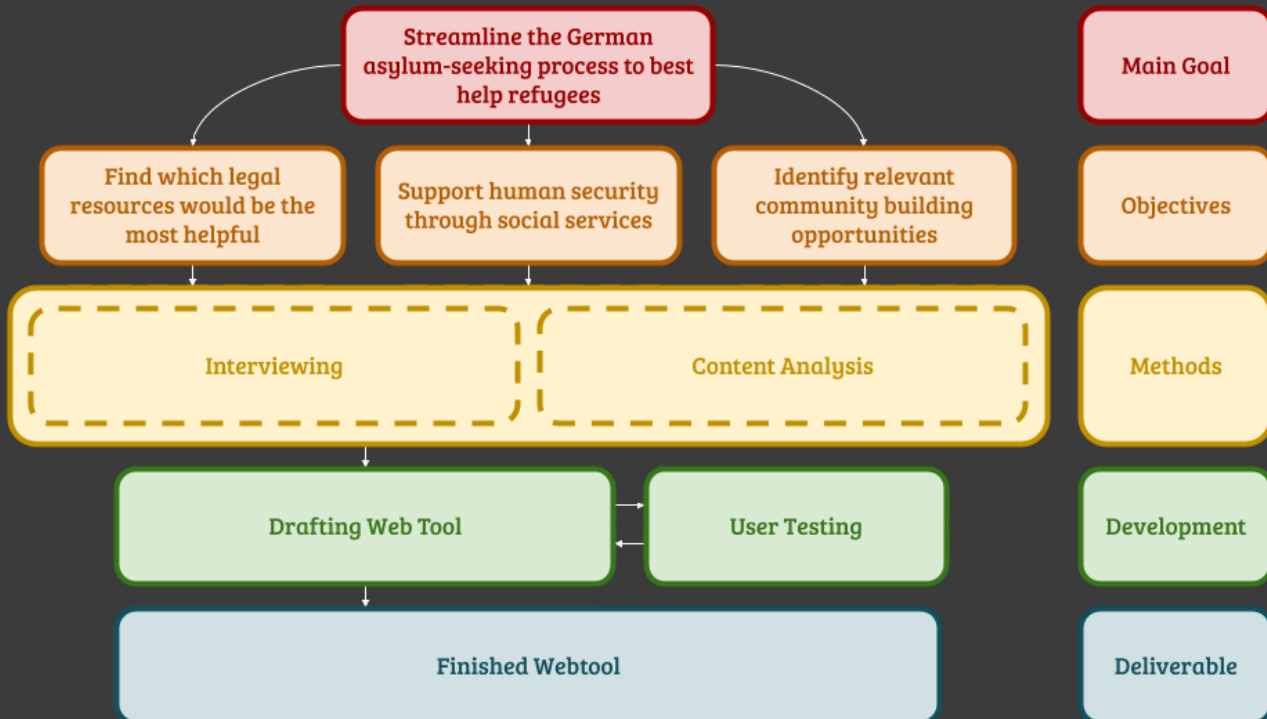
Figure 7: Methodology map.

we segue into questions surrounding our topic, prepared prior to the interview. Each of the interview questions are listed in Appendix A. We strived to make the interview process organic and professional. We allowed the respondent to fully answer each question. Respondents were also allowed to not answer any question they did not want to. This allowed the interviewee to share as much as they were comfortable with, and avoided any interference from the interviewers.

Data Collection

For our data collection plan, we collected data through interviews and content analysis. Refugees are a vulnerable population, so we applied for WPI's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The IRB ensures that all subjects are treated fairly, with respect, and are at minimal risk. It is important to note that the interview questions were translated and read to interviewees in German by a fluent

English and German speaker.

For content analysis, we looked at pre-existing resources available to asylum seekers and refugees coming to Germany. From the information available on these websites, we were able to identify the relevant legal documents and information regarding the asylum-seeking process, common social problems, and resources for community building. For example, while generating the list of NGOs on our website, we were able to collect organizations that were listed on *Welcome to Europe* website that would be helpful to also link to on our site.

Potential Obstacles

We planned for several obstacles when considering our project objective. The data we collected from interviews were either from asylum seekers or refugees or people who work with asylum seekers. To make these contacts, we started reaching out during the

PQP term to gather as much information as possible before our project started. This ensures our group was not in Berlin without organizations to talk to. We also gathered the information we need about the asylum-seeking process from online resources as much as possible through content analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Our project involved interviewing refugees to collect qualitative data. Because of this, our project is classified as human subjects research, meaning that it must be reviewed by the IRB. Every group member is certified by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) to conduct no more than minimal risk research.

We made certain ethical considerations when involving human subjects in our research. Firstly, we were careful with what information we collected about people seeking asylum in Germany. It is possible that the interviewee does not want their status in Germany to be disclosed for their privacy and security. Accordingly, we were not at liberty to collect this type of personal information for our report. With data collection, it is also important that all collected information from interviews was private between group members, sponsors, and advisors. Next, we were cognizant of questions that could evoke trauma while interviewing. We aimed to be respectful of every interviewee's personal experience and allow interviewees to opt out of answering any question.

Finally, while developing interview questions, we found it important to ensure that each question made no assumptions and respected the background of each respondent. For example, when asking interviewees about their experience finding a place of worship, we made sure to first ask if they were religious before continuing with follow-up questions. We asked our questions in this manner to avoid questions that made implicit assumptions about the interviewee and to ensure that we had no influence on their answers.

Data Analysis

In our research, we conducted interviews with three refugees and three NGOs in Germany. The interviews with NGOs allowed us to gain an understanding of the current landscape for help that refugees can access. This allowed us to reach out and find other NGOs that we could feature on our website to offer resources to address different problems. For each NGO we found, we categorized it on our website with different tags like education or housing to help users of our website better focus on an issue they need help with. Interviews with refugees broadened our understanding of the personal difficulties and struggles that each refugee went through. Each interview informed us about different dimensions of the asylum-seeking process in Germany. The refugee interviews allowed us to categorize the most common problems refugees face in the German asylum-seeking process. These three categories ended up being legal, social services, and community building. The NGO interviews informed the content for each of these categories. We included links to information and services provided by other NGOs and tools that can guide users through the asylum-seeking process. These tools range from a Lebenslauf and cover letter builder to filling out legal forms. A Lebenslauf is a document similar to a CV in the United States; the document contains previous work or education experience and is required by many jobs in Germany.

Interviewing Refugees

Each of the issues raised by the refugees became different sections of our website. These sections are legal help, social services, and community building. Each refugee we interviewed had different but interconnected issues with the German legal system. The interviewee from Afghanistan had constant long periods of waiting between each step of the asylum-seeking process. Every governmental form was translated into the native language of the asylum seeker, but was still difficult to understand due to its complex prose and topics. Both the Ukrainian and the Afghan refugee had trouble comprehending legal documents that outline the asylum-seeking process. The Ukrainian refugee explained that many tools for refugees existed but lacked translations into Ukrainian or English. For example, a lot of sites or hotlines advertise support for multiple languages, but after calling, only offer German. Similarly, we found legal tools that exist for refugees for countries other than Germany. One example is Asylex, which provides tools for refugees in Switzerland.

The issues surrounding social services boiled down to difficulties finding housing, a job, and in some cases, healthcare. Similar to the legal process, finding social services was also a difficult and lengthy process. Once the German Federal Office declares someone as an asylum seeker, they are given a healthcare card. This is true for most refugees, but at the time of interviewing the Ukrainian refugee, they were yet to receive their healthcare card.
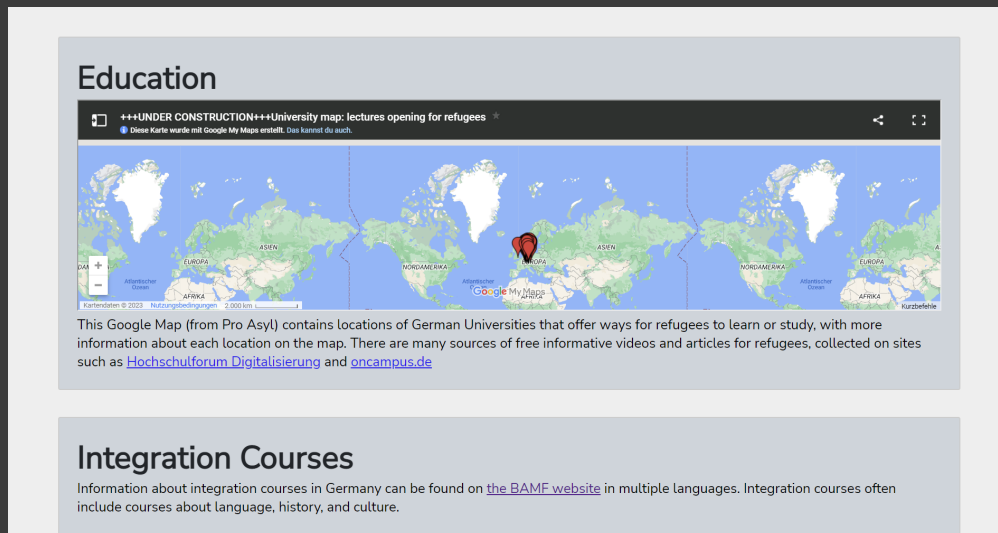
Figure 8: An embedded map with locations of universities for refugees.

Both the Iranian and Afghan refugees received their healthcare card but continued to struggle to find specialized medical care. Refugees also raised the issue of housing in all of our interviews. The Afghan refugee explained that it was difficult to find housing in Berlin because of the lack of apartments. Often housing documents were not translated, making the issue even harder for refugees. Because of these difficulties, the Afghan refugee was still in the process of finding an apartment. The other two refugees had similar problems finding housing, but are currently living with friends. The Iranian refugee spent over 5 years in different refugee camps before living in an apartment with their friend. The Iranian refugee explained how housing and jobs are often connected, detailing that in order to get most apartments, a refugee would need to prove that they currently have a job. Finding a job was a struggle for the Afghan refugee, as they were unfamiliar with

the process of building a Lebenslauf and cover letter. It is hard for some asylum seekers or refugees to adapt to these application requirements. Both the Ukrainian and Afghan refugees had problems finding a job in the same field that they worked in their home country. They explained that Germany, oftentimes, does not recognize experience from one's home country, and that often a refugee must be fluent in German at a C1 level in order to practice in the same field. Social services were the largest problem faced by each refugee we interviewed, and became a larger focus of the website because of these interviews.

Figure 8 shows an example of how we plan to provide resources for the social services page. An interactive map embedded into our website shows different locations of universities across Germany that offer lectures for refugees, helping them to find education opportunities.

Each refugee brought up community building in the interviews. In each instance, the refugees could find a community of people similar to them. The Ukrainian refugee could find a community of other Ukrainians and the Iranian a community of other Iranians. It was easy to find friends among other refugees because everyone spoke a common language and shared similar experiences. In contrast, it is significantly harder to find German friends who are of a similar age. The Afghan refugee explained that it was hard to find German people around his age to meet, as most NGOs helping refugees were made up of older Germans. The Iranian refugee mirrored this, stating that it was significantly harder to find a community of locals to connect with.

Interviews with NGOs

After interviewing refugees, we interviewed three different NGOs to get an understanding of where refugees could find help with various problems. The three NGOs we interviewed were Willkommensbündnis Steglitz-Zehlendorf, UPJ Pro Bono Rechtsberatung, and Justice Connect. The first NGO interview was with Willkommensbündis, who focuses on helping refugees with a wide array of problems. They also hold monthly meetings with local communities and refugees. One example of how they help is by matching refugees with volunteers, for subjects like language, living in Germany, or musical instruments. Willkommensbündis echoed that finding German friends their age is significantly harder than finding a community of similar refugees. This recommendation resulted in us adding a map to our website showing local soccer clubs that welcome refugees to training sessions and games. They also recommended adding a list of cricket clubs, as cricket is popular in Iran. We had previously planned on sending out a survey to get quantitative data to help in prioritizing components of our website. Our goal in creating the survey was for it to be quantifiable, quick, and easy to take. However, after speaking with Willkommensbündnis, we decided not to release the survey, as they pointed out significant flaws in our questions and told us that limiting refugees' responses to a Likert scale would likely not produce useful data.

The second NGO we interviewed was UPJ Pro Bono Rechtsberatung, the owners of immigration4ukraine.eu. This interview was focused on technical aspects for the creation of a website. It reinforced our need for sections about housing, healthcare, and education. This NGO primarily informed our creation of our community forum. They thought that the community forum was a good idea in general, but would require lots of time invested. They had a similar forum during COVID and it took a lot of time to set up and moderate. We developed the idea of a community forum into a potential home-grown community of NGOs and volunteers that would join the server to work on community outreach. The ultimate goal of the community forum would be to have refugees helping other refugees.

Figure 9 shows the current community forum. There are different categories of channels, as well as the different roles for members of the server. Admins can manage the server, moderators can remove inappropriate chat messages and ban users, NGOs and volunteers can provide general advice to members, and specialists can give members information about specific topics. Roles with special permissions will be granted
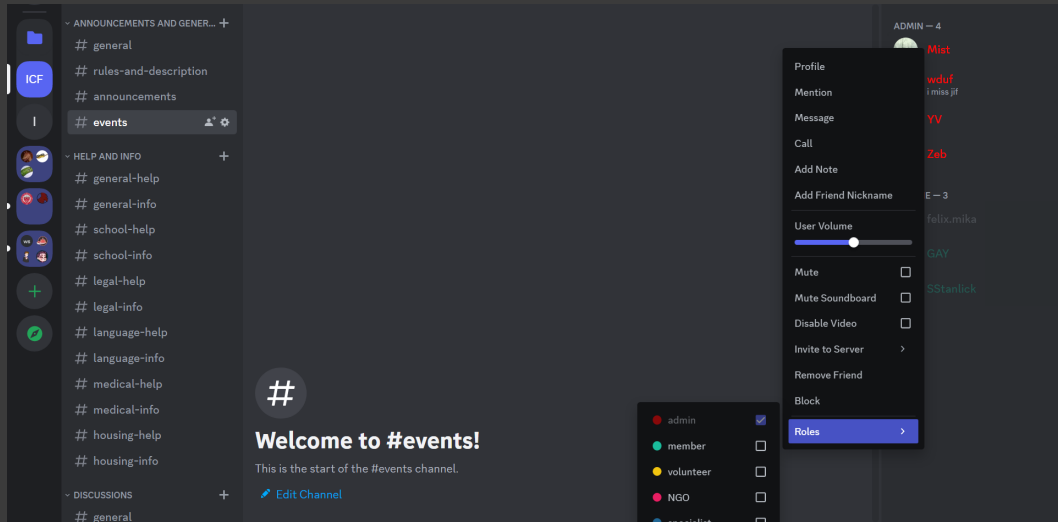
Figure 9: Our Discord community forum.

by admins or moderators.

During the interview with UPJ, we also decided that the legal aspect of the asylum-seeking process would be too technical for us to cover. Therefore, our sponsor, who is studying law, would write the legal portion of our website. A majority of the interview was consumed by showing a beta version of our website, and we used the feedback gained from that section to improve the design and content of our website. The interview concluded with learning more about different NGOs that provide different services, including legal. They also recommended looking at the NGO, Justice Connect, an Australian non-profit that creates legal tools used by UPJ.

Next, we interviewed Justice Connect to ask about various technical aspects of our website. They brought up the importance of readability for sections such as terms of use and privacy policy for our website. The terms of use and privacy policy sections need to be in clear readable text. The privacy policy ended up being small in comparison to similar NGO websites because we do not store cookies or user information in any capacity. We used their feedback on readability for the development of the documentation on how to expand upon our website (see Development: Results and Outcomes). Justice Connect requires a much more detailed privacy policy, in part due to the large database they use for securely storing user data. If, in the future, our project needs a database to store information, we would use a similar privacy policy. We also discussed how Justice Connect did user outreach. Justice Connect runs a social media that invites other firms to join their legal network. This allowed them to gain users majorly through their network of legal firms. Networking would be helpful in the case of our project, as we can connect to other volunteers and NGOs in order to have them help with the website or join the community forum. We ended the conversation talking about the possibility of having a lawyer-client matching system on our website similar to some of the tools found on their site. It would necessitate that more infrastructure be built, like a database to store available lawyers and their contact information.

Development: Results and Outcomes

Our project deliverable consisted of a website containing legal resources, social services, and community building opportunities. The website was coded from scratch. The sponsor of our project initially ranked the different ideas for our deliverable by importance so that we had a comprehensive list of tasks with a clear order that we could follow. The rankings can be found in Figure 10. The task of creating the website was iterative and went through many designs and drafts to result in a finished product.

The content which populates the legal resources page was developed mostly from our sponsor. Through our research process, we were still able to collect information to help with the creation of legal tools which will be on our website, but our group did not focus on the creation of these tools. Despite this, our group developed an overview of the asylum-seeking process in the form of a roadmap that is at the top of the legal page. The rest of the legal page will be developed by our sponsor. More specifically, he will be responsible for coding and implementing future tools and we are responsible for making sure that adding these tools to our site will be easy. Our sponsor has shown interest in adding several legal tools, such as document-completion tools, lawyer-refugee matchmaking tools, legal counsel, and FAQs.

The social services page contains links to sites with housing offers and job listings, as

01	Easily expandable and maintainable website
02	Community forum
03	Interactive legal roadmap
04	Wiki style information with useful links
05	Lebenslauf and cover letter creator

Figure 10: Priority list.

well as nearby locations that offer integration courses. We also included links to maps with nearby education and healthcare providers.

The community building page includes links to local organizations and events, as well as links to various NGOs or other opportunities for refugees to get involved in their communities. We also created a Discord server for asylum seekers, refugees, and volunteers who use the site. On this community forum, users can help each other and share information and personal experiences not captured on the site. It is important to note that this forum must be left to an NGO or other entity to maintain and moderate. The moderation would ideally be done in conjunction with the community, as to give the community say in the forum. Sections of the Discord also contain volunteer opportunities and ways that people can get involved in helping out.

Most of the resources on the website are generalizable to any refugee or asylum seeker, regardless of situation or country of origin, but there are a couple Iran-specific tools, pages, and features. A translation option is provided that allows the website to be displayed in different languages to better accommodate our users. Looking towards the future, certain asylum seekers from different countries may also have specialized cultural or health situations about which our website could provide information. Each of these country-specific resources will create a more focused experience as opposed to a generic website for all asylum seekers coming to Germany.

The community resources page of our website contains information and activities that will help newly arrived asylum seekers feel more at home in their community. This page links local groups and events in which users can participate. Events that they could want information on like Oktoberfest are listed with a description of each one. We have a section on local food and cuisine so that users can bond over a shared liking of food. For example, one section of our page includes a link to an organization called Open Kitchen, and explains how they use food to help connect refugees or other community members. Another part of the page contains local sports clubs to allow refugees to get to know the local community and make friends.

We added detailed comments and documentation for the code for our website. We included explanations as to why we designed components the way we did, as well as instructions on how to use or change them. These instructions are in the form of a wiki, and contain an overall tutorial on how to start from scratch and edit our website. The instructions also show how to add new languages and new text blocks to the website to accommodate new information being added. The wiki is contained within the GitHub repository and can be publicly accessed. We did this to ensure that future groups who use our website template can easily edit or expand upon our site.

Figure 11 displays the home page of our website, with links to important pages.

Figure 12 shows our home page, but with the German language selected. The language selection persists across pages and lasts until the browser is closed.
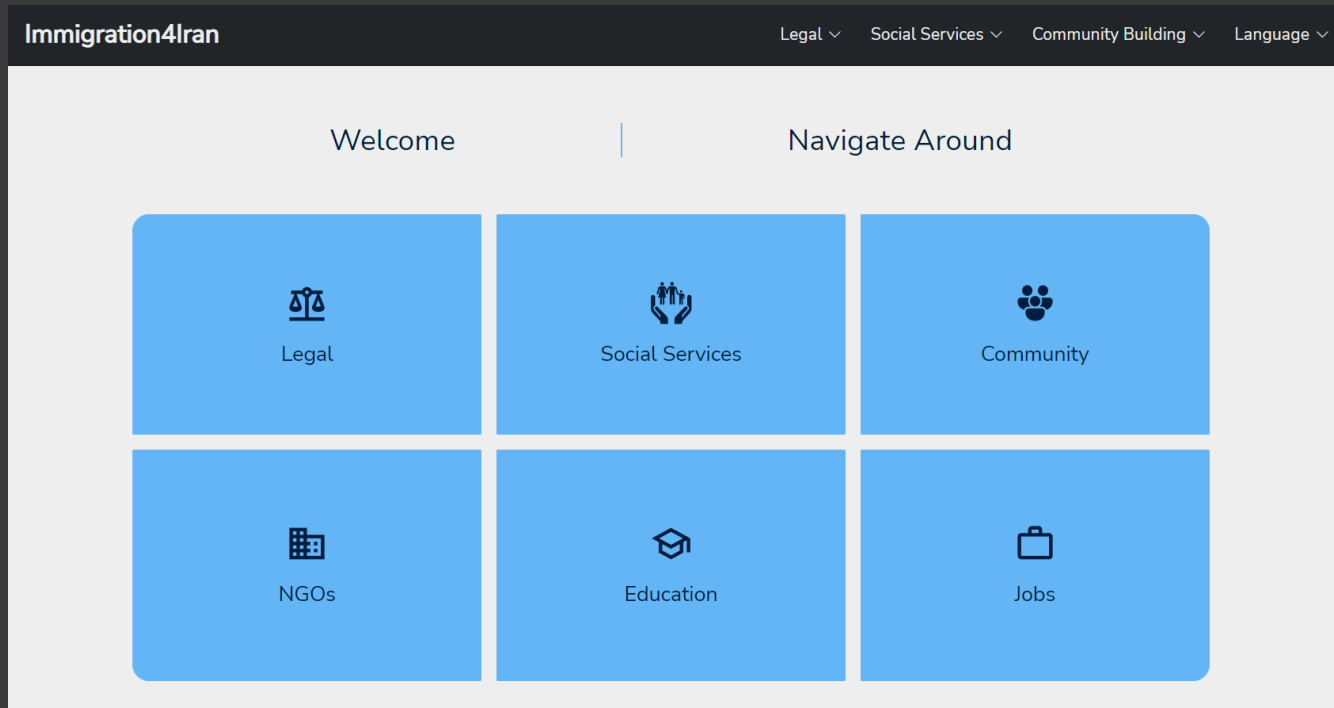
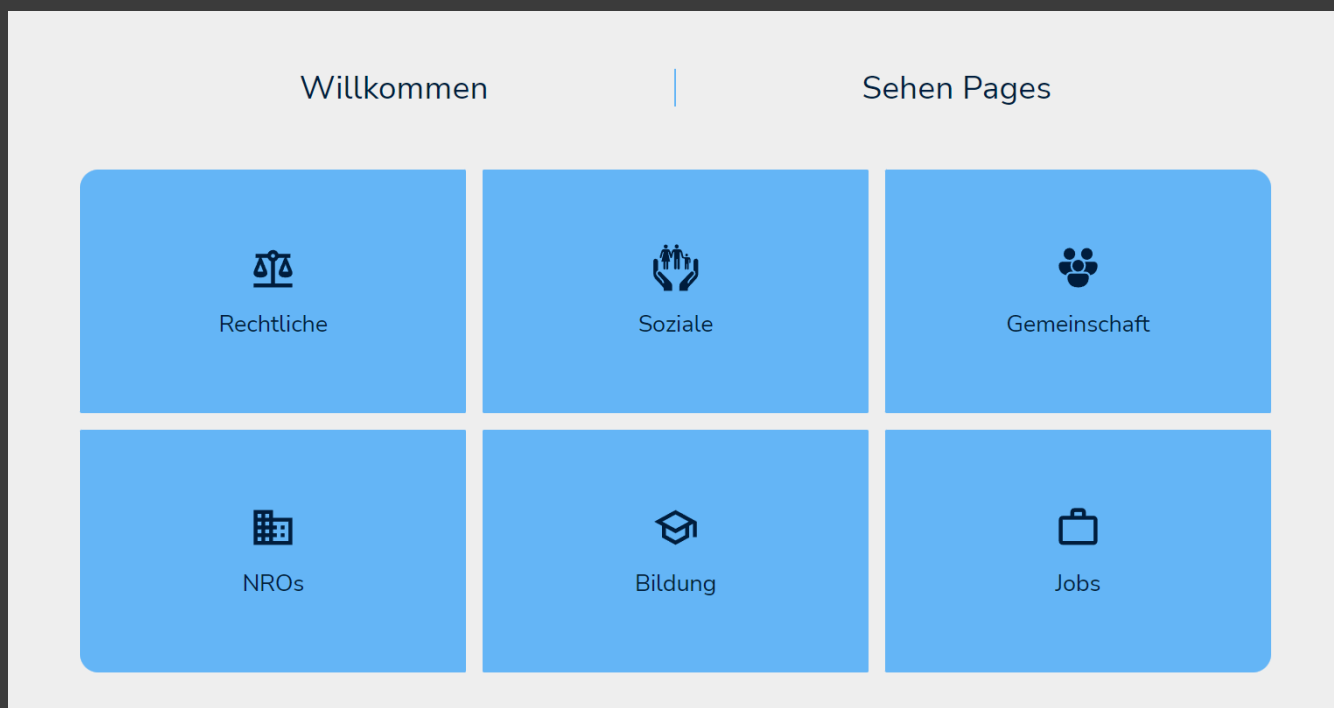

Figure 11: Our home page in English.
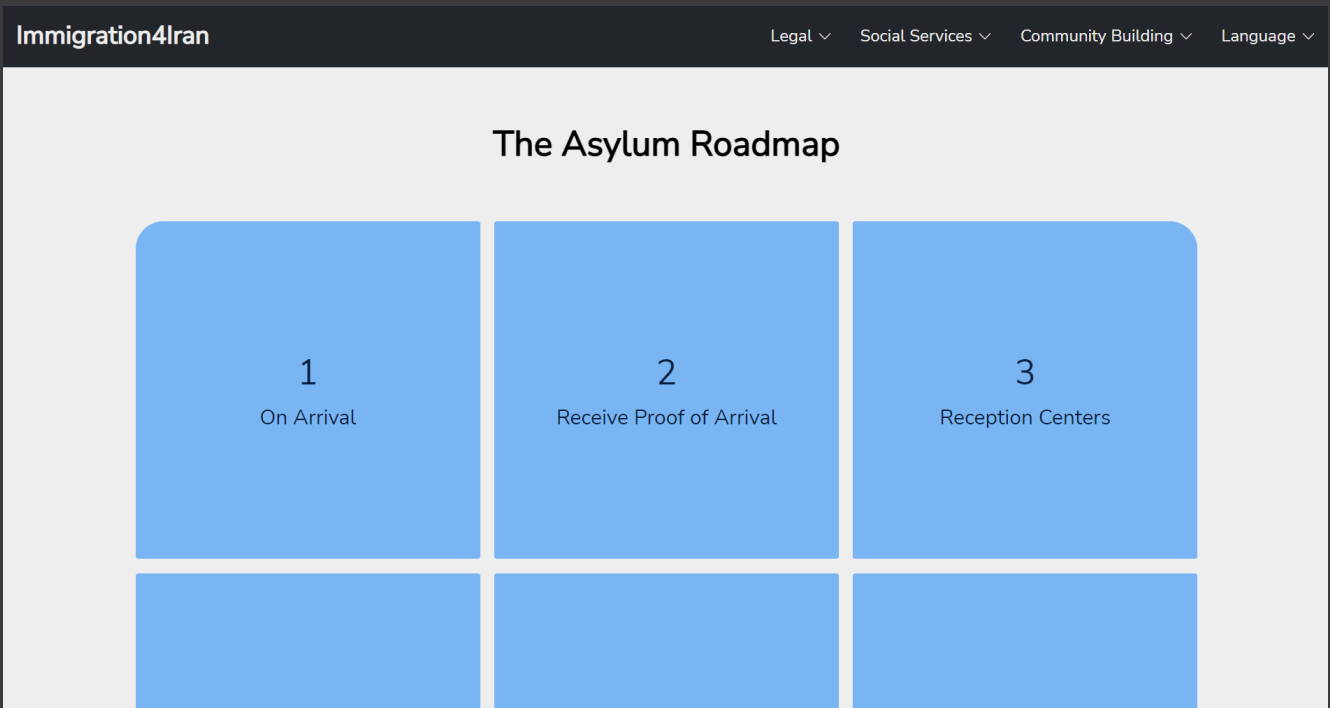

Figure 12: Our home page in German.

Figure 13: The legal roadmap page.
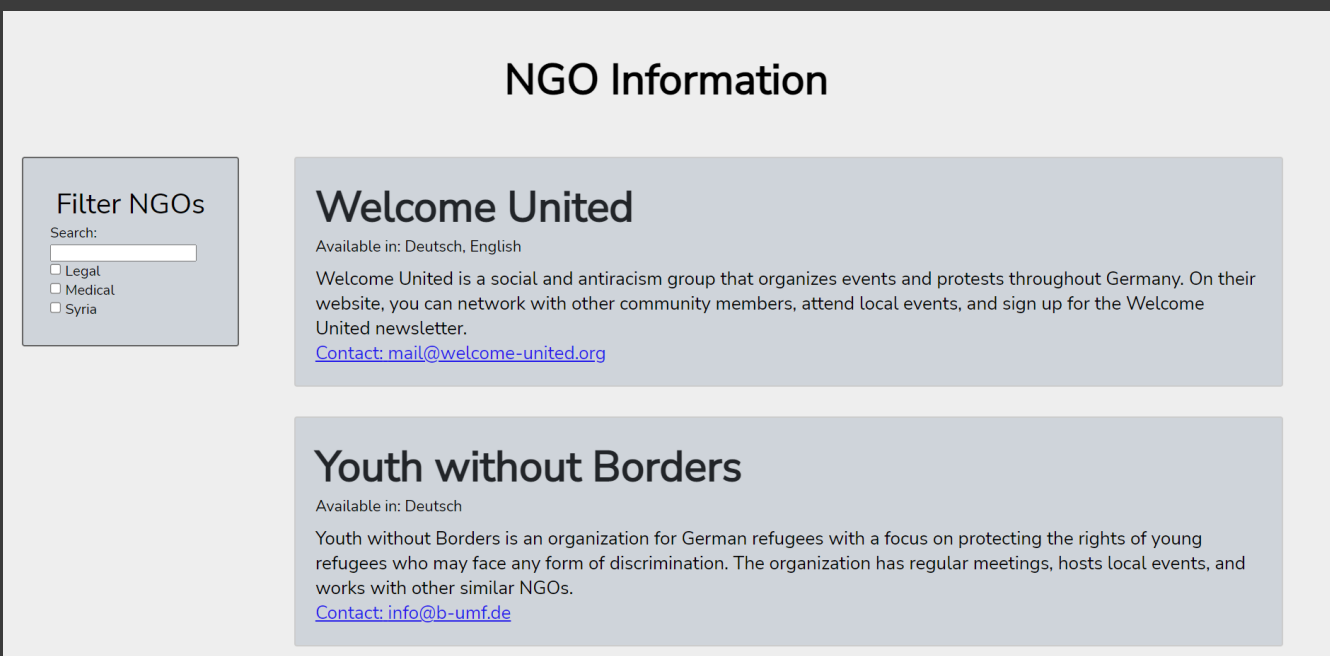
Figure 14: The NGO page with search functionality.

Figure 13 is the legal roadmap. The legal roadmap was one of the first documents we made using the asylum process laid out on the German Federal Foreign office website. We initially made the document as an XML diagram to show where each block would be located and how much space each step would take up. We then styled and designed the blocks to fit on our website.

Figure 14 shows our NGO page with a working search bar and filter. The search bar allows you to search keywords and phrases and would only show NGOs that matched.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Recommendation based on Data Analysis

Based on the data analysis, our team recommends further expansion of the website to satisfy the goal of creating a tool as a part of a larger effort to streamline the asylum-seeking process. We intend for the website to be used as a collective impact tool, allowing for many existing organizations to work together towards a common objective. We had a limited amount of time to collect data surrounding refugees and the asylum-seeking process. Therefore we were not completely comprehensive in the data we collected, missing research on topics such as the legal process of asylum. We aimed to focus on social services and community building, as determined from our interviews with refugees and NGOs.

The legal section of the websites contains a legal roadmap of the German asylum-seeking process, but could be expanded to include more legal help. This legal help could take the shape of document completion for legal documents for asylum seekers. During interviews, we learned that papers and information are not passed between various German government offices. Our legal page could partially rectify this issue by building a portfolio of legal documents and store them on a secure online platform. Platforms like Asylex that exist to help refugees through the asylum-seeking process with online tools that can create documents like appeals. However, this tool only exists for the asylum process in

Switzerland, and would need to be applied to the German asylum-seeking process. The NGO Justice Connect manages a lawyer-refugee matching tool that provides refugees with specialized legal help. This could also be implemented into the legal aspect of our website and work in conjunction with the community forum. Volunteers and experts on the community forum could be matched with refugees who are looking to go through the asylum-seeking process.

As mentioned previously, we have also created detailed documentation in the form of a wiki on GitHub. This wiki includes how to add a new page, edit existing pages, add new text blocks to pages, and more. When looking to expand the website to other countries, the documentation can serve as a guide on the steps we took to make Immigration4Iran. The website may grow more complicated over time, but it is important that the template exists for future NGOs to make the documentation accessible. An example page of the wiki is shown in Figure 15.

The documentation of the website allows for each page to be expanded upon. Going into the future, the number of NGOs in the NGO page should be expanded. Finding relevant NGOs was a large part of producing our website, but because of our limited development time we missed out on various helpful websites. The community page should also be expanded in a similar fashion to add more community events. These community events are an important part of building a community, but they often change depending

Figure 15: GitHub Wiki.

on the time of year. The number of translations the website contains can also be expanded to allow our website to apply to different countries of origin. Our website currently offers German, English, and Farsi translations. This could easily be expanded to Arabic and other languages to be more accessible.

We would also recommend that the sponsor continue to maintain the community forum, which is a Discord server we made alongside our website. This forum is a major aspect of our project, which can provide a means for refugees and volunteers to connect, and is a major part of the larger collective impact idea behind our project. This Discord

currently contains many different text channels like general help, school help, legal help, and more. This forum acts as a place for asylum seekers and refugees to talk and share useful information they find. Because of the vulnerable nature of communities like these, moderation of the Discord is a necessary part of maintaining it. For example, someone must stop bad actors that can join the text channels and spreading misinformation or harmful speech. This moderation would need to be handled by an NGO or organization in order to ensure that the community forum stays a safe space for asylum seekers and refugees.

We also created a pamphlet to hand off that advertises our website in its current state. The pamphlet details the pages of our website. The pamphlet also provides a bit of context to our project, with a link to our website and a call to action. The pamphlet can be seen in Figure 16.

Summary of Data Analysis

Seeking asylum in a new country after fleeing your home is a very difficult and stressful experience. In order to learn how to best help asylum seekers in this position, we proposed the following objectives for our project: (1) find the existing resources that refugees use to ease the transition to Germany, (2) identify the ways that technology can most effectively help refugees resettle in terms of social services and human security, and (3) design our project in such a way that future teams can seamlessly expand and improve upon it. Through researching these objectives, we were able to connect with refugees and NGO volunteers who were familiar with the asylum-seeking process and use their experiences to gain a better
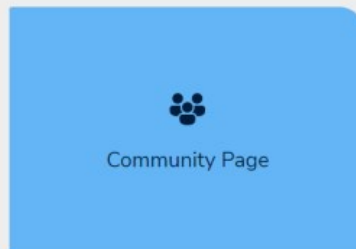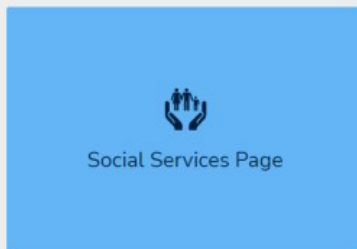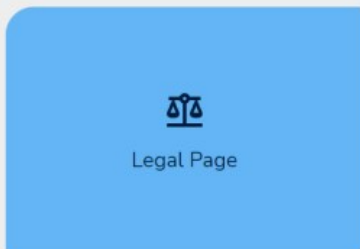
understanding of the most significant issues refugees face. Their input allowed us to change the design of our website to best suit the needs of asylum seekers coming to Germany. By listening to the struggles of people who have already been through the asylum-seeking process, applicants can receive specialized support, making the overall application process simpler.

There were several limitations that we faced when researching and developing our deliverable. While we gained a lot of valuable insight through our interviews with refugees and NGO volunteers, we only interviewed three of each, which likely does not accurately reflect the thoughts of the German refugee population as a whole. Another limiting factor was the time frame which we had to work on this project. This was one of the key factors that influenced our decision to stop focusing on the legal parts of the asylum-seeking process. It also heavily impacted our final deliverable, as we decided to switch from creating all the tools on the site to linking to pre-existing tools. Linking to tools allowed us to cover a larger breadth of information, as opposed to only creating tools on a few topics. Despite these limitations, we believe that our project can serve as a starting point for similar projects looking to aid asylum seekers using technology. Our website template can be expanded upon easily and opens the door for other sites to be made for asylum seekers from other countries. We hope that, eventually, asylum seekers fleeing to Germany from any of the top sending countries will have a website specifically targeted towards them so that they may have an easier time transitioning than those before them.

Figure 16: Pamphlet to advertise website.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

(Note: Our sponsor translated questions into German, as applicable)

NGO Interview Questions:

1. Can you walk us through the process of what a refugee needs to do when they first arrive?

2. In your experience, what aspects of the asylum-seeking process do refugees struggle with most when they first arrive?

3. What existing resources do you know of that refugees use when they first arrive, and do they work well?

4. Are there any issues with existing resources that stand out to you?

5. How is the asylum-seeking process different (if at all) for asylum seekers coming from different countries?

6. Are websites (such as the Federal Foreign Office) used by asylum seekers coming to the country?

7. If you could create a new website right now to help incoming refugees, what would you include?

8. Do you have any other connections to people we could interview?

Individual Refugee Interview Questions:

1. Can you walk us through the process of what you did when you first arrived in Germany?

2. When you first arrived, were there any tools that you used that were particularly helpful? What made them especially useful?

3. Once you arrived in Germany, what were some tools and resources that you were looking for that you were unable to find or did not exist?

4. What was your biggest concern when you first arrived in Germany?

5. What did the legal process look like when you applied for asylum/residence/citizenship? Were the forms easy to understand? Were there resources readily available to help you?

6. How was the housing process when you first arrived? Was it provided, easy to find, or a difficult process?

7. How easy or difficult was it to find a job when you first arrived? Were there any websites or other resources that helped you find one?

8. How easy or difficult was it to find places that offered integration courses when you first arrived? What resources (if any) helped you find them?

9. (For those with children or who were seeking education) How easy or difficult

was it to find education providers when you first arrived? What resources (if any) helped you find them?

10. How easy or difficult was it to find healthcare providers when you first arrived? What resources (if any) helped you find them?

11. Did you have any religious concerns when you first arrived, such as finding a place to worship or connecting with a local group? How difficult was this process?

12. Did you have difficulties finding a community of people you could connect with when you first arrived?

13. Is there anything that you felt was missing from our interview that you would like to discuss?

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