



Germany's *la Petite Russie*: Russian émigrés' exodus to metropolitan Berlin

A Report on Russian Integration in Berlin
Berlin, Germany

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Cover photo: Brandenburg Gate is seen in Berlin. Photo by author.

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Location: Berlin, Germany

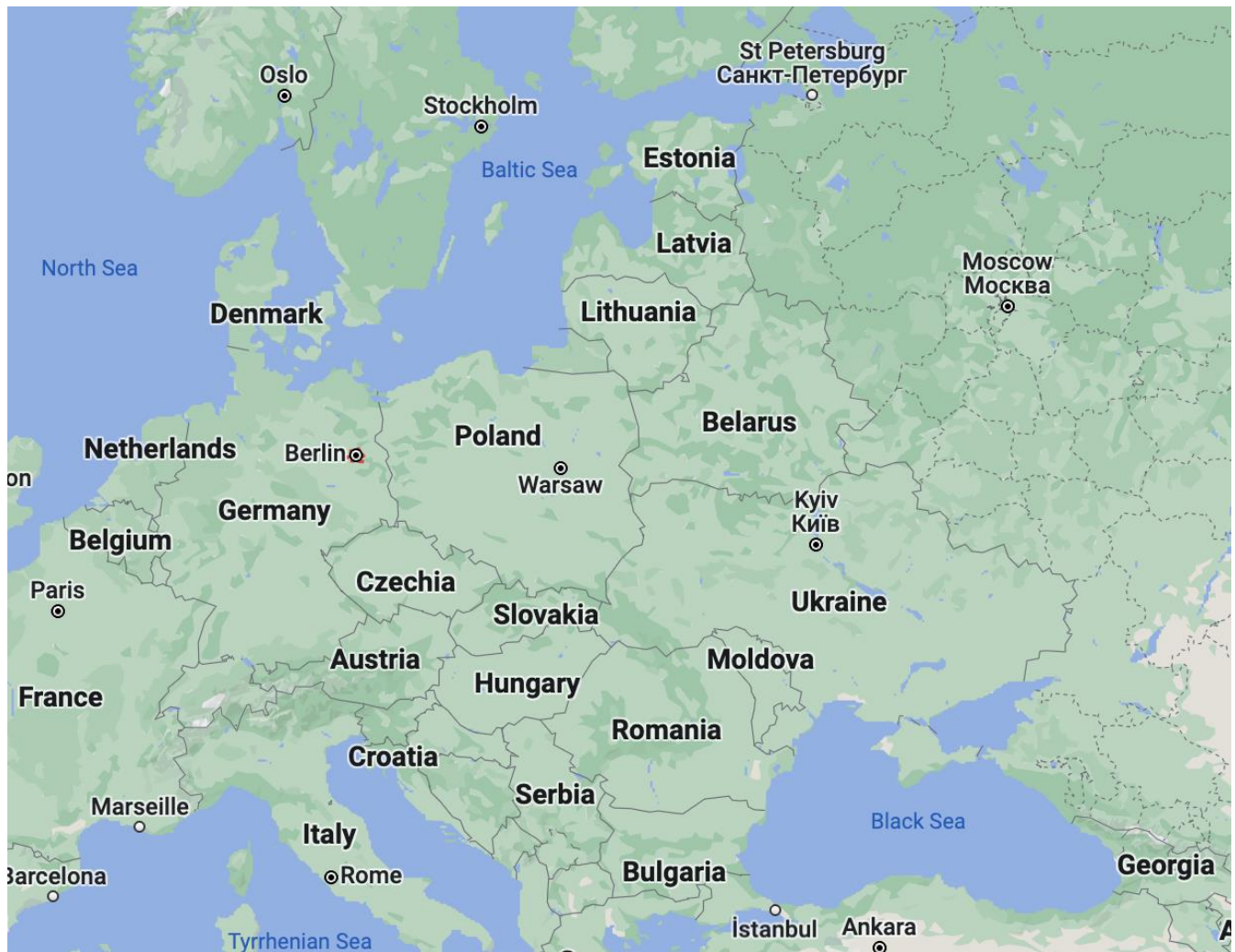


Figure 1. Germany.

Berlin is the capital of Germany and the biggest city of Germany by both area and population. It's also Germany's most multicultural city: 24,3 % of its population [<https://www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de/029-2023>] are foreigners, more than any other part in Germany. Berlin is situated about 55 miles (89 km) west of Poland and about 1130 miles (1819 km) to Russia's border. The closest Russian city to Berlin is Kaliningrad which sits 429 miles (691 kilometers) to Berlin.

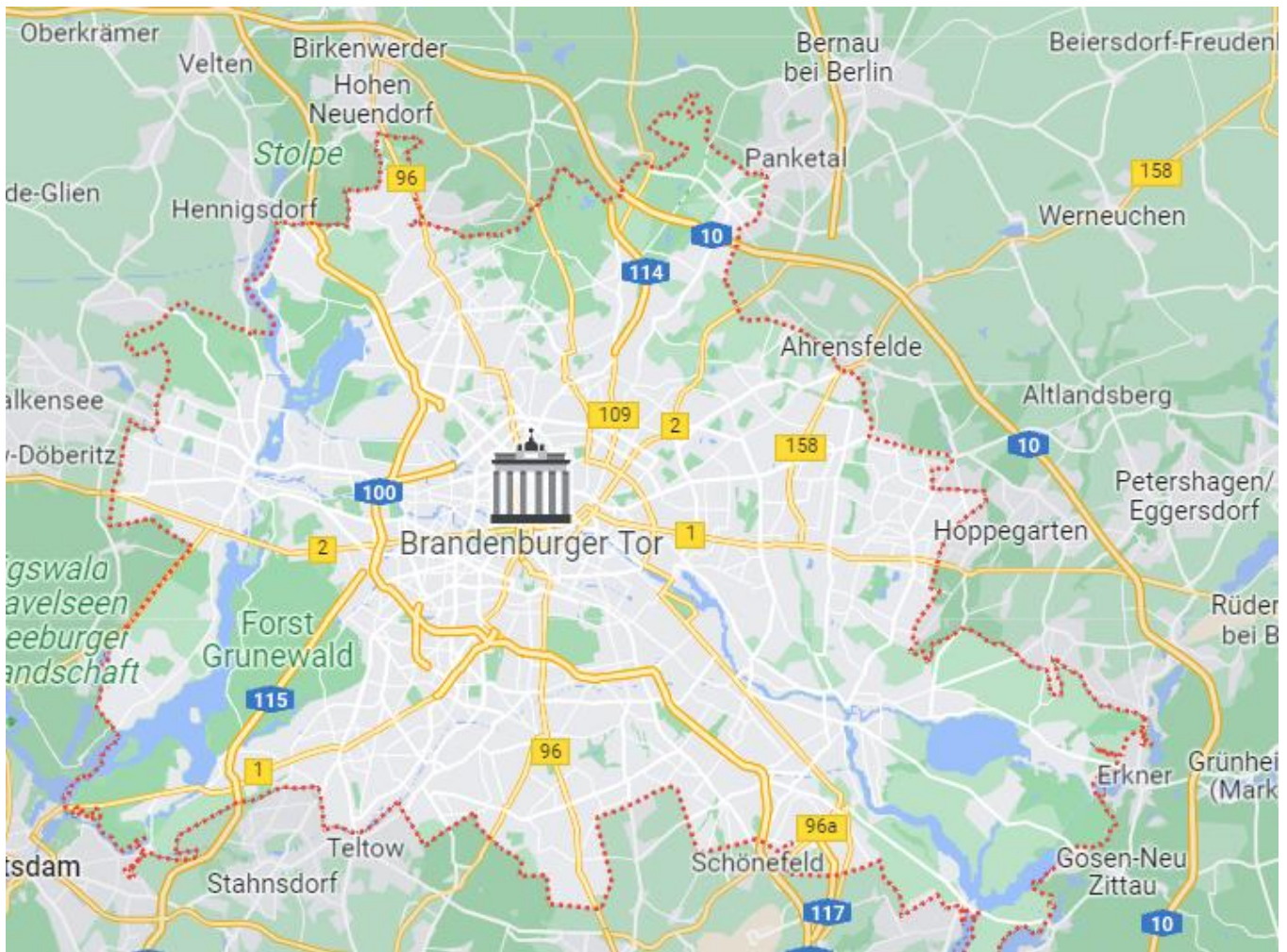


Figure 2. Berlin, Germany.

Berlin is the capital of Germany and one of 16 federal states. It is located in the northeastern region of Germany.

Berlin's districts (Bezirke)	Male	Female
01 Mitte	1,256	1,526
02 Friedrichshagen-Kreuzberg	731	771
03 Pankow	1,083	1,312
04 Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf	1,272	1,806
05 Spandau	1,570	1,943
06 Steglitz-Zehlendorf	833	1,094
07 Tempelhof-Schöneberg	1,190	1,518
08 Neukölln	585	726
09 Treptow-Köpenick	711	884
10 Marzahn-Hellersdorf	3,100	3,469
11 Lichtenberg	2,256	2,442
12 Reinickendorf	813	993
Total by Gender	15,400	18,484
Cumulative Total	33884	

[Table 1. Berlin's female and male inhabitants with Russian citizenship, as of December 31, 2022](#)



Figure 3. Berlin's neighborhoods.

According to the Berlin- Brandenburg statistical office, 33,884 Russian nationals were registered in Berlin in 2022 (an increase from a total of 27,480 registered in 2021). Historically, a bourgeois district of [Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf often called “Little Russia”](#) accompanied the biggest number of Russian nationals (see Figure 3). In 2022, there three districts with the greatest number of Russian inhabitants were Marzahn-Hellersdorf with 6,569, followed by Spandau with 3,513, and Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf with 3,078.

Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf is well known among expats and expatriate families for its developed infrastructure, public transportation system, food scene which comprises crème de la crème restaurants, vegan cafes, nice wine shops and organic food stores. On the streets, the language of communication is often English. This bourgeois district is primarily a residential area for middle income professionals, members of creative industries and “echte Berliner”/Berlin born people.

Both Spandau and Marzahn-Hellersdorf districts are located on Berlin's outskirts. Their inhabitants enjoy an urban lifestyle combined with the lowest rental prices ([10.10 EUR/m2 in Marzahn-Hellersdorf and 9.70 EUR/m2 in Spandau, in contrast to 18.50 EUR/m2 in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf](#)) and entrances to beautiful forests, parks and lakes. Historically many residents of Marzahn-Hellersdorf are able to speak Russian due to its long-lasting GDR (German Democratic Republic) background. Over the last few years, Berlin has faced a housing deficit; however it is not the same in all districts. Marzahn-Hellersdorf with its concrete buildings and many apartments offers much cheaper residential spaces than other districts.

Introduction

There are many factors that have chased Russians away from their homeland. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, introduction of financial, trade, transport and immigration sanctions against Russia, and tighter laws that made it easier to punish dissent in Russia have all contributed to this forced emigration, made worse by the failure of the country's democratic values, the difficult search for a suitable place to seek refuge, and the feeling of being abandoned.

Berlin became a turning point in the fate of countless Russian émigrés and the place where the knot in Russian- European relations dramatically tightened. The capital of Germany— in the same way as it did a century ago – is welcoming new Russian émigrés. The majority of today's émigrés left Russia not because they desire to live in Europe or far abroad, but because of their unwillingness to live in today's Russia. However, Berlin, with many other German and European metropolises, has become a place they feel safe and comfortable, and where their skills and knowledge can be put to use. Although, like many countries, securing legal status in Germany is a bureaucratic and laborious process, the multiple pathways available have helped form *la petite Russie* in Berlin. Today's Russian émigrés in Berlin are working-aged people, well-educated, and relatively affluent. Many of them are members of creative industries including painters, writers, journalists, ecological, social, and other type of activists or academic scholars, or workers of nongovernmental organizations or opposition political movements. Others are from LGBTQ communities whose existence and affiliation have been essentially criminalized under repeatedly updated anti-gay legislation; still others are entrepreneurs, tech workers, and remote workers.

The integration of new Russian émigrés in Berlin life is a multi-directional process with manifold challenges that reflect migrants' and host city responsibilities. This case report identifies the technical aspects of securing legal status and the emotional impacts of settling in Berlin, identifying the challenges and opportunities émigrés face. It highlights the experiences of a particularly vulnerable group of émigrés, LGBT Russians, and finds that despite the relative ease of settling in Germany's capital, the uncertainty of being chased away from home remains.

The Author's Position in Berlin and Experience Researching this Case

Born in Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia, I moved to Germany as an academic scholar in 2006. I worked and did research at the Human Rights Centre of Potsdam University. In 2013, I became a co-founder and leading researcher of the [RUSMPI-Institute on Migration Policy in Berlin](#). Migration and migrants, particularly those from the newly independent states built in the ruins of the former Soviet Union, became my research interest. My [doctoral thesis](#) examines the legal framework of immigration of Russian speaking people from these states to Germany.

Currently, I do research on today's Russian émigrés in Berlin, Germany, am a consultant for number of international organizations on that issue and serve as a pro-bono interpreter for Russian speaking migrants in nongovernmental organizations, including [Mittelhof e.V](#) in Berlin.

Country Context: Germany

Due to the long history of immigration in Germany, Russian-speaking migrants became a visible part of Germany's migratory landscape. After the collapse of the USSR, ethnic Germans returning to the fatherland, Russian-speaking Jews, labor migrants, their family members, and students were the main representatives of Russian-speaking community in Germany, not asylum seekers.

In 2013, Russian nationals made the headlines in German newspapers and ranked 1st among asylum applicants in the country. At that time, Russian nationals of Chechen origin sought asylum in Germany, however, the success quota of their claims was the lowest. Back then, German courts repeatedly said that there was an internal asylum alternative within Russia for all Russian nationals of Chechen origin and, therefore, the number of positive asylum decisions fell to zero.

In 2021, [Germany remained](#) the main country of destination for first-time asylum applicants in the EU [with 148,200 applicants or 27.7% of all first-time asylum seekers](#) followed by France (103,800, or 19.4%), Spain (62,100, or 11.6%), Italy (43,900, or 8.2%) and Austria (36,700, or 6.9%).

In 2021, Germany reported almost 1.24 million refugees and 233,000 asylum seekers. In 2022, the migration authorities registered [252,422 asylum applications](#), making Germany the biggest host country for people in need in Europe. The most asylum applications were submitted by Syrian nationals (70,926) followed by Afghan (36,358) and Iraqi citizens (15,175). [Russian nationals submitted 2,851 asylum applications](#) and therefore ranked 10th among all asylum seekers in the country.

In 2022, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine brought massive immigration inflows from Russia and Ukraine to German metropolises, including Berlin. Circa 1.1 million arrivals of Ukrainian nationals were registered in German territory by the [Federal Statistical Office](#). Roughly 68% percent of them entered the country in first three months after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian citizens became the second largest foreign population after Turkish citizens in Germany. The proportion of Ukrainians in the total population is highest in the two federal states, Berlin and Hamburg, and lowest in the federal land, Schleswig-Holstein.¹

Section 46-2 of Germany’s Asylum Act sets the Koenigstein Quota Principle for refugee resettlement within the country and each federal state. It is calculated every year and combines two-thirds of the federal state’s total tax revenues and one-third of the weighted population numbers. As of 2023, the following [distribution quota](#) has been set for each federal state (see Table 2).

State	Percentage of all asylum applicants
Baden-Wuerttemberg	13.01%
Bavaria	15.56%
Berlin	5.13%
Brandenburg	3.01%
Bremen	0.96%
Hamburg	2.55%
Hesse	7.44%
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	1.98%
Lower Saxony	9.40%
North Rhine-Westphalia	21.08%
Rhineland-Palatinate	4.82%
Saarland	1.20%
Saxony	4.99%
Saxony-Anhalt	2.75%
Schleswig-Holstein	3.40%
Thuringia	2.64%

[Table 2. Distribution quota of asylum applicants per German federal state, 2023.](#)

City Context: Berlin

In 2022, the city hosted 94,727 people in need. This number included 71,097 Ukrainians with temporary protection status and 23,630 other asylum seekers (a 35% increase compared to 2021). In 2021, most [asylum seekers residing in Berlin were nationals of Syria, Türkiye, Afghanistan, Georgia and Moldova](#). Despite the creation of a new federal fund for refugee housing, new apartments couldn’t be built as quickly as people kept arriving to Berlin. As a result, the number of accommodations in the shelters of the Berlin State Office for Refugee Affairs (LAF) rose to record levels. Many new shelters, including those at former city airport Tegel, hosted Ukrainians coming to the country en masse.

“Berlin is the place where everyone feels needed... we live at the time when “our soil” [our country] was taken away from us... at that time Berlin remains the place where “our environment”, ‘our people’ are existing.” (Marat Gelman, a Russian producer, gallerist, and an op-ed columnist at the discussion “Russians without Russia” in Berlin-Wedding in February 2023)

¹ Both the terms “state” and “land” are used interchangeably in this report to refer to Germany’s 16 federal states. The term “land” comes from the German word “bundesland”, which translate to “federal state.”

“Russians abroad are forced to live despite the circumstances.” (*Ludmila Ulitskaya, a famous Russian author at the discussion “Russians without Russia in Berlin-Wedding in February 2023*)

For decades, Berlin along with London, Paris, and Constantinople were the centers of Russia’s exile activity (Williams 1966: 122). Tsarist, Soviet, and today’s Russian émigrés settled in Berlin. Berlin was and remains “the first capital of Russian emigration and a caravanserai of Russian creativity” (Marten-Finnis 2021:169), the place where “... everyone met who

traveled between Moscow and the West” (Roditi 1961:316). In the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, Russia’s best minds gathered in German metropolises to create an autonomous communication space outside of Russia (see Appendix B).

In Berlin today, there are many elements that reflect the Russian emigration of 100 years ago to Germany. Modern Russian émigrés –in the same way as a century ago– are still coming to Germany to work and live freely. Today’s émigrés are in opposition to Russia’s ruling government and are against the war on the territory of Ukraine. For them, Berlin remains to be “a relatively inexpensive place to live” and a place where “[political] émigrés recently expelled from Russia met other [...] émigrés” (Williams 1968: 582).

Similar to back then, today Berlin, like many other German metropolises, still offers relative safety for many Russian artists, painters, writers, students, political activists, and opposition members by keeping them away from the observation and control of Russia’s state officials and agents.



Brandenburg Gate is seen in Berlin. Photo by author.

Legal Statuses and their Impact on Settlement

Today's Russian émigrés in Berlin have some difficulties in defining and describing themselves: they are not refugees (because this term is socially reserved for Ukrainians forced to leave Ukraine), they are seldom fugitives [беглецы] or relocants (because they didn't relocate, they left their lives behind and have not yet settled or integrated in Berlin). The majority of them spoke about themselves as "runaways" in contrast to those who remain in Russia. Generally speaking, many respondents define themselves as "Russian(s) abroad" in contrast to those "Russians at home."

One respondent described himself as a runaway thrown out from Russia by the energy of the blast wave in Ukraine (E., a male respondent, 38)

Russians abroad can roughly be divided into five groups by their legal status within the country:

1. Russia's émigrés residing with a Schengen visa (type C) or with a German national visa (type "D");
2. Newcomers submitting an asylum application within the territory of Germany;
3. Highly qualified Russians with blue card status, the main residence permit for foreign university graduates;
4. Those with a legal permit, known as *Aufenthaltstitel*, according to § 19-21 Immigration Law (AufenthG), i.e. specialists from creative industries and freelancers; and,
5. The family members of *Aufenthaltstitel* permit holders.

The German immigration system is well-known for its quite conservative character and fewer opportunities for flexibility and compliance. However, the place of respondents inside each group is fragile, dependent on circumstances, and can shift easily. Irrespective of chosen classification and demographical and/or personal characteristics of respondents, there will be some differences and similarities.

Schengen Visa (type C) Status

“In April 2022, no one knew or could tell us how to ‘transfer’ a Schengen visa into any type of a German residence permit. My sister and her German husband helped us to find a migration attorney. He proposed to apply in a frame of a special regulation for artists/self-employed creators [known as *Künstlervisum*]. The procedure requires [applications] for a such visa at the German mission abroad. We had no opportunity to do so: our whole family, children were already here. Then, the attorney suggested writing an explanatory note why we couldn’t leave Germany and submitted our visa application in Russia...They accepted that!” (L., a female respondent).

After the war broke out in 2022, many Russian émigrés entered Germany with a Schengen visa (type C) which allows them to stay legally within the country/Schengen zone for a short period of time, i.e. for maximum of 90 days within a 180-day period. Those who intend to stay longer or have another reason to be in Germany, for example by becoming a student or getting a job offer, must apply for a German national visa, also known as a type D-visa in the applicants’ country of nationality or residence. In the first spring months of 2022, the Berlin immigration office (the Landesamt für Einwanderung, or LEA) made no exceptions. Everyone with an expired or soon-to-be expired Schengen visa was asked to leave the country.

Month after month, the LEA personnel has shown more human solidarity and improved flexibility. The practice of

writing notes with a detailed explanation of the reasons behind why it was impossible to return to Russia under current circumstances became routine in the LEA and Russian emigrants’ communication.

Blue Card Status

...”me and my family, a wife and a son, left Russia for Armenia where we stayed for half of the year. My employer, a German company, engaged with an intermediary agent that dealt with my relocation to Berlin. However, I was also quite active: I found my first apartment in Berlin since I moved. It was an expensive furnished apartment, but I did have my own apartment.

All communication with LEA, issues related to my legal status and a legal residency, the submission of all documents were tasks done by my relocation agency.”

(Y., an engineer and a blue card holder).

Russia’s highly qualified emigrants who entered Germany with a blue card have been supported by their Germany-based employers. , Blue card holders must have a foreign higher education degree that is comparable to a German one and be remunerated by a Germany based employer with a gross annual income of 58,400 EUR (as of 2023) or at least 45,552 EUR for employees in the fields of mathematics, IT, natural sciences, engineering, and human medicine. The status has many benefits, including the right to freely move within the EU immediately after entering Germany (which is not the case for D-visa holders or asylum seekers), the ability to reunite with their families, and eligibility to receive a government allowance for their children.

Aufenthaltstitel Permit Status

Those Russian émigrés who aren't eligible for blue card status (§18b Immigration Law) or qualified professionals according to §18a and 18b (1) Immigration Law dealt with all migration issues before and after entering Germany mostly on their own.

The less qualified IT specialists from Russia in Germany without a high university diploma must submit proof of at least three years of professional experience in the IT industry over the last seven years as well as a job offer in the IT sector with a gross annual salary of 52,560 EUR (as of 2023) in accordance with the §19 c Immigration Law. Also, a certificate of German language knowledge at the B1 level may be required if the employer and/or the applicant do not provide proof that the language spoken at work is not German.

The largest group of today's émigrés from Russia in Berlin are web and other designers, architects, interpreters, bloggers, artists, painters, musicians, and other creative people. It seems that this group--in the same way as the representatives of Russia's LGBTQ community (discussed below)--are the most organized and supportive of other émigrés in this group.

The main challenges of many of today's Russian émigrés in Berlin remains communicating with migration and state authorities in German, opening a bank account and doing banking operations with a Russian passport (due to international sanctions), understanding the scheme and functioning of German health insurance, and getting an insurance card.



A sample Aufenthaltstitel permit. Source: bamf.de

... “On the 25th of February I left Russia for Armenia because it was a visa-free country for me... One German employer promised to support me as a worker from IT industry but vanished into uncertainty and kept me in suspense after finding out that I have no high university diploma and am not eligible for a blue card... I applied for a Schengen visa without returning to Russia, it was a challenge. After coming here [in Berlin], I waited for over 5 months to get any legal status, collected letters of intention from potential employers, wrote an explanatory note that I am at danger in Russia... my mental health gets broken here...”

(a residence permit holder in accordance with § 19c Immigration Law).

The members of this émigré group produced a step-by-step guide with all the official forms, important addresses, contacts of reliable attorneys, tips, and useful internet links for potential emigrants who are interested in moving to Germany and getting settled here. The members of this émigré group are helping and consulting each other at some informal events scheduled by those who have already made their way. Also, a number of nongovernmental organizations established by former emigrants offer free consulting and informational assistance in getting all things done, in particular finding an apartment, opening a bank account, offering a pro-bono translation and/or making appointments at immigration/state authorities offices, etc.

“Having moved to Berlin and founded my own company, I dealt with a lot of absurdity: banks didn’t want to have a new business client with a Russian passport, renting agencies offered working spaces without the [ability] to get internet...they have beliefs about Russian hackers, and that we are a media company played no role to them.” (*M., a male respondent, 37*)

Asylum Seekers and Humanitarian Visas

Special attention should be paid to Russian émigrés submitting an asylum application or applying for a humanitarian visa after the 24th of February 2022. It is important to mention that asylum and humanitarian visas are not the same. The rights and obligations of an asylum seeker visa holder and a humanitarian visa holder differ. The issuance of a humanitarian visa is the responsibility of the German diplomatic mission abroad. The asylum procedure is performed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) within Germany.

“I am in the reception center in Karlsruhe waiting for the next steps of my procedure... My Russian media outlet and team relocated to Berlin, and I do have a job offer. My status is going to change soon (*R., a male respondent, and a journalist from a regional media outlet whose permit, known as Fiktionsbescheinigung, is under consideration by February 2023*).

In accordance with § 22-2 Immigration Law and the country’s law enforcement practice, a Russian national applying for a humanitarian visa, must, among other criteria, be:

...” the success quota for humanitarian visa applicants who fulfilled criteria is about 90 percent. Only 10 percent of applicants get rejected.

- (a) A person at risk in the territory of Russia. Among them are people from the list of so-called “foreign agents”, workers from organizations considered undesirable or foreign to Russian authorities, LGBTQ representatives, opposition politicians, journalists, academic scholars and cultural figures who have openly spoken about the war.

However, the rules and practice get tougher from day to day. In March-April [2021], some people get a humanitarian visa for them and their partners. Nowadays, an official certificate of marriage is mandatory to these who want to be relocated with family, children and/or a partner”. (*D., a German lawyer. She helps journalists and Russians at risk to relocate to Germany*)

- (b) People who have a visible and proven connection with Germany, for example, ongoing research or other work activity within the territory of Germany.

(c) A person of interest to Germany as declared by a note issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany.

Asylum is everyone's right that is stipulated in Art. 16a of German Basic Law. All asylum-seekers crossing German borders and/or within the country must report to a state authority on arrival or immediately after by submitting an asylum claim. The border and/or migration authority sends an asylum-seeker to the closest refugee reception center in the territory of the country.

In Germany there exists a fixed admission quota called the Koenigstein Quota Principle that aims at ensuring an appropriate and fair distribution of asylum seekers to the closest reception center among 16 federal states.

Today's Russian émigrés are cautioned to avoid submitting asylum claims for many reasons. The length and complexity of the asylum procedure, a lower success quota for Russian nationals, and the immigration regulations imposed on asylum seekers² make asylum the last option to these who voted with their feet against the Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

..“As the board member of a so-called undesirable organization in Russia, I had a Polish humanitarian visa which was expired ... I came to Berlin in February 2022 with a Schengen visa because no special regulation was in place on a German humanitarian visa for Russians at that time ... and asylum was not an option to me... A German partner of my [Russian] organization helped me to become a volunteer under a special programme. That is how I got a residence permit for a year in Berlin.”
(D., a female respondent. Today she is a co-founder of a Berlin based NGO)

Russia's LGBTQ Émigrés

LGBTQ+ émigrés from Russia in Berlin are not unusual or rare cases. The LGBTQ+ community of Russian émigrés provides a case study of the solidarity and organization that helps émigrés move closer toward being settled in Berlin, even if not fully integrated.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Russia face incredible social pressure, hate, violence, and persecution due to Russia's federal law titled "For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values," also known as Russia's gay propaganda law. The law was firstly approved by the State Duma in June 2013. Since that time, many amendments of to the law came in force. The 2023 amendment stipulates that individuals can be fined up to 400 thousand RUB (ca. \$6,000 USD) and organizations 5 million RUB (\$70,500 USD) for "propagandizing non-traditional sexual relations," while foreigners could face up to 15 days' detention and expulsion from Russia. Nowadays, LGBTQ activists and people are at higher risk of being injured, harmed, and detained: they are double-targeted by the anti-gay propaganda law and the foreign agent law.

Despite legal status and community support, challenges remain

"My emigration is a forced runaway. All of what happened reminds me of a Hollywood thriller 'Argo' ... Having stayed in Russia at the time of the ongoing mobilization, I felt that it was me... who was taken as a hostage ...by my own country." (A., a male respondent)

.."When this shit happened, a friend of mine, he is a German, called me and asked: "What are you going to do? What are you waiting for?.. I have been here, in Berlin, many times, have a lot of friends... I came with a Schengen visa to Berlin ...up to now I stay at [my friend's] apartment." (I., a male respondent)

The LGBTQ community in Berlin is a people-to-people community. In contrast to other groups of Russian émigrés, where every fifth respondent moved to Germany after a stopover in a transit country, such as Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, or Kazakhstan, every second representative of LGBTQ community managed to find a direct way to Berlin.

These émigrés are a bit more fortunate than others: they were hosted and supported predominantly by their network of close friends, friends of their friends and/ or by acquaintances of their acquaintances. The German immigration authorities recognize this group of émigrés as people at high risk.

Many of today's LGBTQ émigrés left Russia due to a visible danger of reprisals, encroachments on life, and bodily integrity; Russia's invasion of Ukraine; a visible danger of criminal and/or administrative mistreatment; the announced mobilization; the lack of freedom of

expression of their gender, cultural, sexual, or other identity; threats and persecution of family members, relatives, friends; physical loss of contacts and sources of income, etc. (in sequence as

chosen by respondents). Despite the existing migration regulation, the majority of respondents have already received a long-term residence permit within the territory of Germany after submitting a note explaining that they belong to the LGBTQ community.

Berlin-based LGBTQ organizations and LGBTQ friendly NGOs mainly offer new émigrés legal and psychological assistance, help in finding/renting an apartment and/or fulfilling immigration documentation, and a few émigrés spoke about the financial aid they received after arrival in Berlin. Many LGBTQ émigrés do not have enough financial resources to rent apartments and/or to finance their daily needs: every fourth respondent was forced to spend their savings they managed to transfer to their account out of Russian banks or took with them; every third is getting financial support from friends, relatives, or the state's asylum benefits. Only three respondents have a regular income due to still running businesses in Russia (here: a web design agency) or employment and project assignments in Germany. Remarkably, two respondents feel that their life quality improved in Germany, others spoke about downshifting and their declining life standards in all areas except safety and the guarantee of their rights.

Despite support and assistance from the LGBTQ community in Berlin and the rest of Germany, many respondents are fighting for their "own normality": they are missing their friends, relatives, parents; they are fighting with "the feeling of not being at home", with "not having an understanding of where their present or future is going to be"; with "not having their own space to stay in alone"; and they have troubles with getting medical assistance at appropriate costs, etc.

The following tasks are prioritized by these émigrés from a short-term perspective: to get a stable and paid job or project assignments (every second respondent); rent an apartment (every second respondent); find friends and like-minded people (every third respondent); enroll into a college, high school and/or get new working skills, qualification (every third

...“Due to the announced mobilization and growing uncertainty, there was no option to accumulate or save enough money.. at least now I am not afraid that my neighbors will call the police... now I calmly communicate with colleagues at work without hiding my belonging to the LGBTQ community. In a moral sense, life has become calmer, but the problems with obtaining some kind of permanent permission to stay shake my nerves, drive me insane, and rattle my brain...the fear of being deported [to Russia] where, in fact, there is nothing left except my anxiety, dread fears and retired parents... [is always with me].” (Anonymous respondent)



A rainbow is seen over the Charlottenburg neighborhood, which is home to many Russian émigrés. Photo by author.

respondent); to survive; find a partner; learn German (every fifth respondent).

It is important to mention that LGBTQ-friendly consultants suggest using diverse channels to emigrate legally to Germany besides humanitarian visas and/or asylum applications to members of the LGBTQ community. Among them: enrollment in German universities or colleges; an au pair scheme; voluntary service in the field of culture, education, or a society-relevant organization for at least one year, known as *Freiwilliges soziales Jahr*.

Multilingual Berlin: aiding or preventing integration?

“...English is my language of communication... we are in Berlin, here everyone speaks English that is why I have chosen Berlin.” (V., a male respondent)

“...the world is shaking, I am not sure that I am going to stay here [in Berlin] in three years (E., a male respondent)

“...I am a forced émigré... I am sure that the regime in Russia will not last long, and I will be able to return. Thanks to Germany for shelter and assistance to all activists.” (a male respondent).

To many respondents, Berlin remains an inclusive city with a vibrant multicultural and multilinguistic community. The majority of the émigrés from the LGBTQ community are fluent in English, some others have knowledge of French, a few speak Spanish/Portuguese, and only some have a basis knowledge of German. Surprisingly, only every third respondent is keen to learn German. Those who do learn German use online resources like Duolingo, however, they intend to find a German teacher in the future.

The reasons behind the lack of desire to learn German vary from respondent to respondent: some feel very comfortable speaking English; others – though thankful to German migration authorities for “a safe haven” - don’t perceive Berlin, Germany as a place to live forever; others have a multicultural circle of friends and working colleagues speaking English and so German is

not required; others remain to be in stress and shock, and, therefore, have less of a capacity to learn German. Only two LGBTQ respondents perceive Germany as “a country of opportunity” and “see [in Germany] extraordinary opportunities that are not available elsewhere.” The Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Denmark, Finland—and France are countries of preferable residence in question for this group of émigrés.

Every second émigré from the LGBTQ community thinks that his/her emigration will last more than five years; every fourth left Russia forever and is not going to go back; only one has the intention to return to Russia when the war is over and one respondent – asking himself the same question every day – has found no answer to this question.

“Since March 2022, the Quarteera consultants provided help and relocation assistance for about 2,500 cases that applied to both refugees from Ukraine and Russian LGBTQ persons and their partners who were forced to leave the country due to the tightening of the law on LGBT propaganda. By February 2023, 94 Russian cases were submitted through and with the Quarteera assistance for a humanitarian visa and got approved.

However, it is not a proven procedure or mechanism, all decisions are made on an individual basis and require a lot of work. The approved cases included individuals and families, but rarely families with children.

The main challenge and today’s task is to assist our people distributed to other federal lands and help them to move to Berlin.” (P., a representative of a Berlin-based LGBTQ organization Quarteera e.V.).

Conclusion

Berlin as other German metropolises became a safe haven for Russia’s new émigrés, albeit many of them are not certain about staying in Berlin, or Germany, long-term. While some may assess that knowledge of at least one foreign language, educational background, European-derived culture, and willingness to be incorporated through labor market and educational attainment in the host society, Russian émigrés feel safe and secure in Berlin, and Germany generally. However, technical and emotional challenges remain.

The German state does not help the vast majority of today’s Russian émigrés adapt to their new setting by easing access to employment (Russian blue card holders are the exception) or some state services such as state-covered health care (which Russian asylum seekers receive). Additionally, German bureaucracy makes banking with a Russian passport, understanding the German health insurance scheme, communicating with migration and state authorities, and other mundane tasks challenging for Russian émigrés. On top of this, they are forced to deal with simple existential questions and search for the meaning and purpose of their lives, ways to make a living. They must also find ways to overcome crisis, dread, and anxiety. While Berlin has become a safe *petite Russie*, it has not erased the uncertainty of the future that pushed Russians out to begin with.

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Appendix A: Methods

Before planning research and choosing precise wording for research questions, methodology and sampling technique captured the author's mind. To explore feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of new Russia's émigrés in Berlin required a qualitative research method of conducting in-depth interviews with 14 respondents selected by snowball method. This sampling technique as a non-probability method aims to recruit potential candidates by previous respondents. Thank to assistance of two LGBTQ organizations, the answers of respondents from LGBTQ communities became the part of the RIT report.

Due to a high sensitivity of respondents' current life situation and risks that need to be observed/managed, the interviewees have the choice to identify themselves with any name/nicknames. The outcomes of in depth-interviews and quotations are anonymized. Respondents did not receive any compensation for participating in the study and/or providing referrals. Two respondents withdrew their answers and two declined an invitation to speak about their current migration experience.

Appendix B: Refugees in Country

According to data of the Federal Statistical Office, 83.2 million people were living in Germany at the end of 2021, including 11.8 million foreigners. In 2020, 10.58 million were registered on the territory of Germany. More than one in ten people living in Germany (12.57% of the entire population) had no German citizenship. Turkish people accounted for the largest group (1.3 million people or 12.4%) of the total foreign population. They were followed by Syrian (787,000 or 7.4%) and Polish nationals (774,000 or 7.3%). Ca. 235,000 Russians (2.2%) and 135,000 Ukrainian citizens (1.3%) were living in Germany at the end of 2020.

At the end of 2020, ca. 1,86 million people or 2.2% of the entire German population seek protection on the territory of Germany, 216,000 of them have had an open/undetermined protection status. Looking at the demographic characteristics of these persons, the country could expect a growing potential on its labour market in the coming years: 27.5% out of them are minor children (0-17); 72.1% are working aged (15-64 y.o); 4.2% are older than 64 y.o. Majority of people in need (61.3 %) are men and single (56.2% of all people seeking protection).

By the end of 2022, 1,019,000 Ukrainians resided the territory of Germany or seven time more than before February 2022. Ukrainian nationals on the territory of Germany holding § 24 Immigration law in accordance with the EU Temporary protection Directive received Hartz IV basic unemployment benefit in the amount of 449 euros (from June 1, 2022) and increased amount of benefits from January 2023, i.e. adults - 451 euros; children 14-17 years old - 420 euros; children 6-13 years old - 348 euros; children under 5 years old - 318 euros.

Additionally, circa 399,000 people seeking protection in Germany received benefits in accordance with the Act on Benefits for Asylum Seekers (AsylbLG) by the end of 2022 (+4.3%, or 17,000, compared with

2020). Every third of them were minors. The most frequent countries of origin of the country's social benefits recipients were Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Appendix C: Refugees in Berlin

Berlin is among the cities in Germany that have taken in the most refugees, however, the city's capacity for housing people in need has reached its peak in 2022. In January-November 2022, 12.237 new asylum seekers were registered in Berlin (7.812 people in 2021 or +43 %). Additionally, there were more than 1,000 refugees coming in Berlin in the frame of special resettlement programs, such for Syrians in need of protection and 340.000 people from Ukraine have received initial care in Berlin, of which 100.000 would have been placed in more long-term accommodation there.

By the end of 2022, every fifth resident of Berlin was a foreigner (24.3 percent of all inhabitants), however the proportion of foreigners living in Berlin varied between the city's districts. The highest proportion of foreigners with 36.7 percent of all foreign inhabitants had Berlin-Mitte, the lowest with 14.8 percent registered in Berlin- Treptow-Koepenick.

A similar picture is emerging among the Berlin residents with a migration background. Migration background means ties to the country/countries due to a place of birth of parent(s) or his/her own country of birth. Every second inhabitant of Berlin-Mitte had a migration background (56.8 percent of the district residents), in Berlin-Treptow-Koepenick their share was 22.3 percent.



Figure 4. [Berlin's neighborhoods](#).

The Russia's invasion of Ukraine and an influx of Ukrainian and Russian nationals has an impact on urban image of the German capital. In 2022, Russian nationals with 4.9 percent of all newcomers registered in Berlin ranked at 9th place among all foreigners most frequently moved to Berlin; Ukrainians with 3.1.percent took the 11th place. The five foreign nations most recently moved to Berlin were Indians (17.5 per cent of all immigrants); Moldovan (8.6 percent), Syrians (7.6 percent), citizen of Turkiye (7.4 percent) and Afghanistan (6.4 percent). By 2022, three nations – Turkiye with 101,325 people (+2,371), Ukraine with 57,495 people and Poland with 54,068 people are largest group of foreigners residing in Berlin.

Appendix D: Russian Émigrés in Berlin in the 20th Century

Some observers found that Berlin in the 1920s looked like “a small Peterburg that grew up out of the civil society movement which stood up to the opposition of the official Soviet government” (Schloegel 1998:78). In the 1990s, Berlin was called “Moscow on the Spree” (Grigoriev 2023). Ilja Ehrenburg, a writer, journalist, and later historian, called Berlin the “step-mother of all Russian states”. A famous poet and literary critic, the president of the Berlin circle of Russian émigré litterateurs Vladislav Khodasevich compared Berlin to a “Caravanseraï”, meaning a place that offered hospitality and safety to travelers along their way (Schloegel 1995: 78).

Berlin was the place where “the Russian émigré intelligentsia’s attempts to orchestrate a coup d’état [in the Tsarist and Soviet Russia]” (Gay 2020: 7) as well as “the major city of the Russian emigration” (Williams 1968: 581)... where representatives of all political spectrums, intellectuals, artists, and writers found their place and safety. In the 1920s Alexander Kerensky, the Prime Minister of the Provisional Tsarist Government, resided in Berlin. Vladimir Nabokov, the father of the famous Soviet writer, was assassinated in the Berliner Philharmonic Hall by right-wing extremists and died in Berlin in 1922.

Among Berlin’s members of the “Association of Russian Writers and Journalists” were philosopher Nikolaj Berdjajev, poets Andrei Belyj and Marina Zwetajeva, as well as writers Alexey Tolstoy, Maxim Gorki, Viktor Shklovsky and many others. Over 150 journals, newspapers and almanacs were written in the Russian language and printed in Berlin. This city was the headquarters of 48 Russian publishing houses by 1922 and 87 publishing houses by 1924 (Marten-Finnis 2009:83). In 1922, the first Russian Art Exhibition with Russian avant-garde artists took place in Berlin. In the 1920’s, a younger generation of Russians came to Germany “to sit at the feet of great German thinkers”. The number of Russian students enrolled in German universities nearly tripled in 1900-1914... especially in Berlin (1174), Leipzig (758) and Munich (552). (Williams 1966: 126) From then until today, Berlin remains “the third capital of Russia” (Grigoriev 2023) and the “literary [creative] center of Russians abroad” (Kodziz 2002:77).

About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Leir Institute for Human Security at The Fletcher School at Tufts University.

Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

www.refugeesintowns.org

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