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A Transatlantic Perspective: Welcoming Cities and the Policy and Practice of Refugee and Immigrant Integration

BY SUSAN DOWNS-KARKOS

How are immigrants welcomed to their community, and to what extent is the arrival of newcomers met with ambivalence, fear, or even hostility?

How can we transform the challenges of migration into a significant opportunity for immigrants and to the local communities?

How can transatlantic dialogues highlight the benefits of being a welcoming community and ways to promote inclusion?

Today's Imperative for Welcoming

The world continues to witness a rise in global migration. Growing numbers of people leave their countries of birth and venture to faraway lands to seek new opportunities. For immigrants and refugees, the process of leaving home for a new and unknown place requires courage and grit. To step on a boat, to navigate a confusing bureaucracy, to cross an uninviting border -- no matter the pathway, immigrants risk so much in trying for a new beginning. But what of the communities that will receive them? How will longer-term residents view their new neighbors, who speak a language and come from a culture or religion often so different than their own? To what extent will they welcome immigrants to their community, and to what extent will the arrival of newcomers be met with ambivalence, fear, or even hostility?

These are the questions with which countries across the globe struggle. Whether a sending country, a receiving country, or even both, nations are trying to figure out how to better manage not only migration, but the long-term integration of immigrants and refugees who come to their shores and hope to call it home. Nations are being tested in new ways and are required to reconsider how to welcome and integrate newcomers. The powerful images of children and families fleeing violence and seeking asylum in Europe have been burned into the consciousness of people worldwide. There is greater concern than ever before about the plight of refugees everywhere, and the need to create a more welcoming policy and culture so people can rebuild their lives has rarely been so clear. How can we transform one of the greatest challenges of our time into a significant opportunity - one that can make a difference in the lives of millions of immigrants, in Europe and across the globe - and to the local communities that welcome them?

While the humanitarian need is well known, there is a growing economic imperative for welcoming newcomers. As populations age - whether in the U.S., Italy, Japan, or Germany -

governments must ask themselves where they will find the talent to keep their communities vibrant and economically competitive in the years ahead. A growing body of research documents the significant economic contributions immigrants and refugees are making to communities – as employers, workers, and consumers. Yet too many receiving communities remain conflicted about immigrants. Leaders need to recognize the special opportunity to support the dreams of these newcomers and to see how with a little investment, their talents can be harnessed to supply the workforce that 21st century economies increasingly need. Through welcoming investments in language learning, workforce training, and connection building with the receiving society, among others, migrant families' hard work can help fuel national economic vitality well into the coming decades.

The economic benefits immigrants bring also go beyond the workforce – immigrants are also a disproportionate share of small business owners. Their businesses have helped revitalize communities like Columbus, Nashville, and Dayton, where main street businesses like grocery stores, restaurants, and dry cleaners, are employing community members, strengthening the tax base, and growing the local economy. Welcoming newcomers also brings more social and cultural vitality to our communities, with diverse ideas and perspectives helping to fuel innovation and bringing a renewed sense of vibrancy.

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shaped not by race or religion but by what one brings and how they live their life.

While some federal governments have been paying attention to immigrant integration and developing policies and funding

Common values are also an important part of this conversation. Whether in Germany or the United States, our democratic countries are

streams to support it, in the end it's the local context that determines the extent to which newcomers feel they belong. How a family is treated in their new home community – in the schools, on the job, and out on the street – will be a major determinant of their trajectory of success. A growing number of local governments fully recognize the importance of promoting a welcoming community. Certainly local governments in Germany are among the most ardent leaders in this sphere.

While migration has brought significant challenges to both Germany and the U.S. in recent times, this is also an issue that can help bring the two countries together and foster even closer cooperation. While the two countries' historical contexts around migration are much different, the responses they face from the receiving community share many common elements. Whether German or American, longer-term members do have concerns about their changing cities and towns – a fairly universal human response to change. How those concerns are recognized and addressed is an area where both countries can focus and learn from each other. In the process, they can face welcoming work together and bring these two global leaders even closer together at a time when relations with other parts of the globe tend to receive greater attention. There's nothing like a common challenge – or opportunity – to join people and nations together in more meaningful ways. This is the chance to re-energize relations between Germany and the U.S.

It was in this spirit that the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Welcoming America, and the Urban Institute last month brought together local government and civil society leaders from Germany and the United States to share lessons learned in processing immigrants, welcoming them, and engaging the receiving community. As this Urban Institute blog post highlights, the session explored the fact that both countries have faced significant stressors but have innovative efforts underway that can inform each other's practice.

Towards a Welcoming Germany

Arguably no country is being tested in its ability to welcome refugees to the extent that Germany is right now. Strife in the Middle East has brought record numbers of asylum seekers to Europe, deeply challenging the European Union and its ability to use a coordinated approach to manage migration. Over a million refugees found their way to Germany alone. While asylum seekers were met with a broad range of reactions from the receiving countries as they tried to seek safety and opportunity, it was Germany that stepped up in communicating and demonstrating an unprecedented outpouring of acceptance

and welcome. Indeed, as refugees began to arrive in Germany in large numbers in 2015, they were met with incredible gestures of welcome. Volunteers from across the country mobilized to help house, feed, and comfort those in need. It was and continues to be a remarkable humanitarian response.

While Germany's welcome of refugees is laudable, it hasn't come without controversy. Tensions have started to simmer. There are significant logistical challenges as the country seeks to work through the legal, language, and workforce needs of

refugees. The country is challenged in its capacity to help resettle and integrate a million refugees, and there has been some backlash from the receiving community in the process. Cities and towns with fewer Muslims, less economic opportunity, and a greater tendency towards xenophobia are more fearful and have seen a rise in negative rhetoric, anti-refugee demonstrations, and hate crimes. How can Germany sustain the positive initial response and capitalize on the talents that refugees bring without succumbing to fear of the other?

Germany is facing a pivotal moment today. While it has taken in many refugees, it is also the economic powerhouse of Europe and a global economic leader that demographics show will increasingly rely on diverse talent. It is likely that the country will continue to become a progressively diverse and multi-ethnic society. Will Germany embrace a future of greater diversity and retain its global leadership, or will it allow fear and fragmentation to stand in the way of a cohesive and economically prosperous society?

Germany's federal government has made significant financial and infrastructure investments for a number of years in immigrant integration, with a focus on language learning and cultural orientation, among others. For much of this time the emphasis has been on direct services to help improve the lives of newcomers. Only in more recent times has the government fully considered the need to address community receptivity factors to a greater extent. While the federal resources are robust in Germany, the challenge can be that there is less pressure at the local level for others to step up and become involved when integration is seen as only a federal issue.

In order to ensure the successful integration of newcomers –

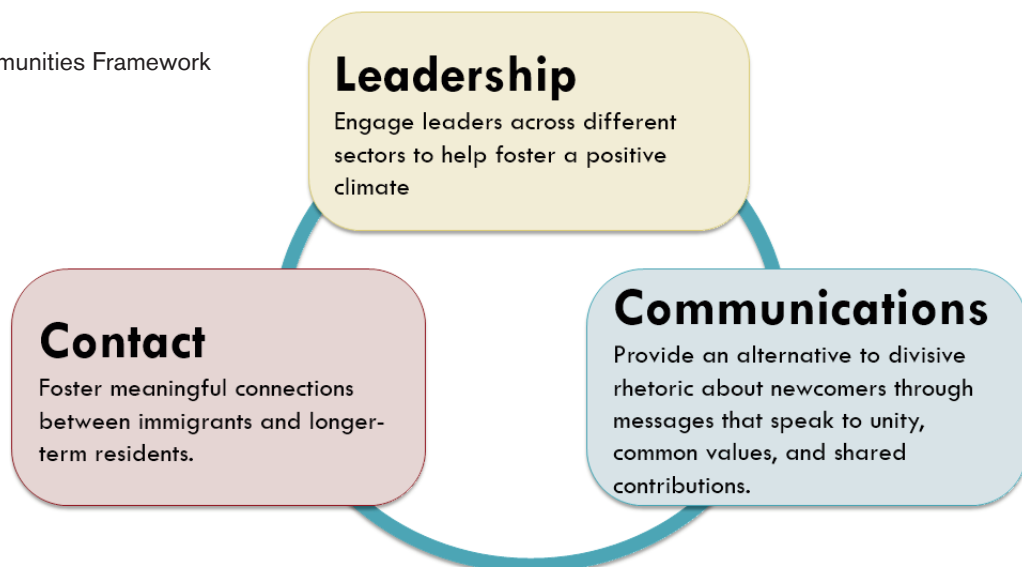
and to avoid a backlash among long-time residents – a growing number of Germans recognize they can benefit from an approach that focuses holistically on all residents, both migrant and receiving community, and on creating the infrastructure, welcoming climate, and networks that will ensure a “fertile soil” for successful community building at the local level.

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Germany's example of welcome to date has come to inspire many in the U.S. as few, if any, U.S. communities have received such numbers of refugees at such a pace. Germany can be an example to the world, but it is at a crossroads. If this moment is handled correctly, Germany can establish itself as the clear European (and arguably international) leader in refugee integration and welcome, demonstrating to the world how welcoming refugees benefits a country economically and socially while staying true to its humanitarian and democratic values by embracing an inclusive vision of what it means to be German. However, achieving this outcome will require a very deep, proactive approach of receiving community engagement so that longer-term residents understand who refugees are and why they are worth investing in. In the longer-term, successful integration requires not only direct services and programming to help newcomers succeed; it also requires a proactive effort with the receiving community that builds social cohesion and belonging.

THE RECEIVING COMMUNITIES APPROACH

Figure 1: Receiving Communities Framework



Research and practice points to the importance of Welcoming America's **Receiving Communities Framework** in fostering a positive community climate for refugees, migrants and all members of communities. This three-pronged approach, developed by Welcoming America (see Figure 1), has been shown to help overcome divisions and effectively create a welcoming community. The three components include:

- **Leadership.** Whether elected officials, business leaders, faith leaders, educators or others respected by receiving community members, it's important for community leaders to be involved and supportive of welcoming efforts. They can be positive spokespeople for the importance of a unified community, and then send important signals to the receiving community that demographic change can be a positive force.
- **Contact.** All too often, immigrants and receiving communities don't have meaningful connections with each other. Language and cultural barriers can get in the way of people

developing the relationships that are part of a cohesive society. Facilitated contact-building efforts, which bring people together through shared interests, can help create these meaningful connections. Examples of contact-building activities include working together on a community garden, mutual language learning, a quilting project, or any other activity that helps people have an enjoyable cross-cultural experience. Such experiences can transform the opinions of people who may have little meaningful contact with people from different backgrounds.

- **Communications.** Media coverage of demographic changes can be negative and polarizing. Sharing a positive message, which is crafted around shared values – such as safety, economic contributions, education, family, or faith – will go far in setting a positive tone. Hearing from spokespeople who have credibility with the receiving community and can share a positive community vision will go far in providing an alternative to divisive rhetoric.

Towards a Welcoming America

Despite its rich immigration history, like other nations the United States has complex and often conflicting attitudes towards newcomers. This is particularly acute during a presidential campaign, when immigrants may become a political issue and are too often in the cross-fire of political rhetoric. Creating welcoming communities in the U.S. doesn't happen on its own – it requires intentionality and resources, and a growing number of local governments in the U.S. have stepped up to make this work a priority.

In the U.S., there is little national public policy in place that focuses on integration; rather, the emphasis is on immigration and who is allowed to enter the country. Less prominence is placed on what happens to people once they arrive. Even for refugees, the focus is early employment for self-sufficiency, and less so on language learning or career advancement. This is starting to change, however, and through the White House's Task Force for New Americans, many federal agencies are examining how their mandates support welcoming communities. The White House's Building Welcoming Communities Campaign, in partnership with Welcoming America, provided recognition and access to technical expertise for campaign-enrolled cities that wanted to strengthen their welcoming effort. So while federal funding for supporting welcoming communities remains modest, there are positive signs that the federal government is beginning to recognize the role it could play in supporting and expanding immigrant integration and welcome.

Unlike in Germany, the focus on integration has historically been at the local level. Cities in the U.S. started a national

dialogue with each other on welcoming communities only in 2013, when it became clear that many were creating their own local innovations around immigrant inclusion and that individual local government efforts were disconnected from each other. There was no centralized conversation or place where cities could turn for good information and learn from each other on developing language access plans, re-tooling workforce systems, or promoting greater civic engagement for their increasingly diverse communities. U.S. cities recognized that municipalities in Europe, like Stuttgart, were also doing groundbreaking work and that sharing approaches with each other was missing.

Welcoming Cities: Framing the Conversation, a product of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and Welcoming America, served to make the case for greater local government focus on immigrant integration.

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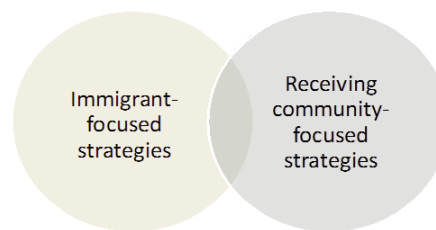
Welcoming America created the Welcoming Cities and Counties network in 2013 in response to the need for U.S. cities to connect with each other on welcoming approaches, and the result was astounding, as a handful of 10 early adopters grew to a vibrant network of 70 welcoming communities, spanning from Anchorage, Alaska to Hillsborough

County, Florida; from Boston, Massachusetts to Denver, Colorado. What the members of the Welcoming America Network soon learned was that they weren't in this effort alone – that many local governments were trying to figure out how to develop and strengthen good policies and practices that support immigrant inclusion and the engagement of the longer-term, receiving community. The network allowed them to develop new relationships with each other, and to adapt good ideas from other communities to their own local context. Through annual convenings, webinars with experts, coaching, communication campaigns, and other opportunities, they were able to intensify their work. Many of these new communities went on to sign on to the White House's Building Welcoming

Communities Campaign, where they were able to receive group and tailored technical assistance from some of the nation's leading experts in the immigrant integration space – learning best practices and sharing resources on areas of common interest such as immigrant economic development; using data; building connections in communities; expanding access to language interpretation; and many others. The result is that while the number of Welcoming Cities in the U.S. continues to grow, the level of sophistication behind their work is also deepening. Many have gone on to adopt new strategies around community policing, immigrant entrepreneurship, community mentoring, and so many others.

Welcoming America's Welcoming City

Framework (see Figure 2) outlines key strategy areas that benefit both immigrants and the receiving community, where good policy and practice can facilitate welcoming communities. Welcoming Cities begin by assessing which programs and policies they have in place now, to what extent newcomers are connected to those areas, what gaps remain, and ways to go about filling them. Many are using a cross-sector, comprehensive approach to create and implement welcoming community plans across all of the five content areas. Welcoming Plans are the gold standard for creating a welcoming community, and have been created and implemented by cities across the U.S., such as Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Boise, Austin, and so many others that have brought together government, community based organizations, business and residents to proactively plan for inclusion



Welcoming plans include programs and policies that advance immigrant integration and inclusion under the following categories:

- Leadership and Communications
- Equitable Access
- Economic Opportunity and Education
- Civic Engagement
- Safe and Connected Communities

The Welcoming Network has grown from a nascent group of early adopters to a robust and influential cohort of champions of the welcoming movement, who are active both locally and nationally. Together they've strategized on issues ranging from the reception of Unaccompanied Children at the U.S./Mexico border to the community fears following the Paris attacks. They continue to bring the country back to a positive vision of the future, based on inclusion and maximizing diverse talents. In 2015, it became apparent that the tone in the U.S. was being deeply influenced by current events in Germany, as both record numbers of U.S. volunteers came forth wanting to help

refugees while others loudly expressed fears and concerns about events overseas and safety in their own community. Mayors and County Executives by-and-large responded with an enthusiastic welcoming message, and leaders understand that in this global environment, what happens in one corner of the world impacts all of us. The network looked to Germany with admiration and gratitude for their generosity towards refugees seeking safety. They wanted to be of help, recognizing that the phenomenon of migration impacts and connects us all.

Promoting Transatlantic Dialogue

While few countries have faced a situation at the scale that Germany has, there are some lessons that can be shared from the United States. A growing number of local governments have connected local actors in communities through a focused multi-sector Welcoming collaborative, engaged proactively with the receiving community to create a more inclusive culture, and are working together in a national network of city-level practitioners. Germany can also implement these building blocks for a more successful and efficient process of integration. Indeed, German practitioners are already connecting with peers in the United States to exchange ideas and best practices around what works to create welcoming cities and towns – strengthening both the field of work and transatlantic relations at an historic moment. The timing for sharing learning between the U.S. and Germany, and to adapt ideas from each other, is truly ripe.

Welcoming America recognizes that now is an ideal time to engage in greater transatlantic dialogue around the benefits of being a welcoming community and ways to promote inclusion. While Welcoming America has had the good fortune of sharing its model with representatives from European countries over the years, deepening and sustaining the dialogue is now a priority. For while the increases in migration have certainly brought their challenges, there is now a new level of awareness in communities on both sides of the Atlantic that we must devote significant time, talent, and resources towards immigrant integration. For in many ways, the refugee situation is the new shared challenge of the transatlantic relationship, requiring dialogue and cooperation between the U.S. and Germany. As the two important leaders, the example set by the U.S. and Germany in rising to the moment will impact the approaches towards inclusion by other countries in their respective regions.

It was in that spirit that Welcoming America, along with its partners Cultural Vistas and the Böll Foundation, launched the Welcoming Communities Transatlantic Exchange, a first-of-its-kind opportunity for sharing ideas, approaches, and inspiration across the Atlantic with new and established local welcoming community leaders from the U.S. and Germany. Under the exchange, over three years, groups of Americans and Germans will visit each other's countries, focusing on communities that have had challenges with significant and unexpected migrant influxes or those with unique and

Community Policing in Boise

One of the models that German participants studied while in the U.S. was Boise, Idaho's community policing model. The Boise Police Department employs a refugee liaison, who helps build trusting relationships between refugees and the police. The position educates newcomers about the laws and customs in the U.S., which are often much different than those from their countries of origin. Many come from countries dealing with police corruption and need to get to know officers in order

successful approaches to addressing integration. The program aims to build the capacity of local integration leaders and, through them, strengthen the welcoming infrastructure of the communities in which they work. Participants will learn important new skills around issues such as community engagement, refugee outreach, positive communications, local policy development, evaluation, and many other areas critical for creating a community where all members can thrive. The Welcoming Communities Transatlantic Exchange is supported by the Transatlantic Program of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany through funds of the European Recovery Program (ERP) of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy (BMWi), as well as by the U.S. Department of State, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

In April 2016, the first set of representatives from Germany came to visit the U.S. for nine days of learning, sharing, and action planning, visiting strong examples of welcoming cities in the U.S., as this video highlights. Both local government as well as nongovernmental organization leaders came from five cities that have had a significant number of newcomers arrive, and where they have faced challenges not only in meeting their needs, but also working to maintain a positive climate for all. Participants were interested in learning about a wide variety of topics, ranging from labor force integration to how to help LGBT refugees. Many were interested in strategies for preventing backlash against newcomers and in building new partnerships at the local level. Coordination between government, NGOs, and volunteers was another significant interest.

The five communities represented on the trip included Dresden, Essen, Mannheim, Stuttgart, and the Swiss Saxony region. While in the U.S., they were able to learn not only about the welcoming community model, but also to visit cities that have successfully tackled these issues first-hand and to think about how they might adapt these approaches to fit their own local contexts. U.S. communities that were featured included Boise, Idaho; Clarkston/Atlanta, Georgia; the State of Ohio (Columbus, Dayton, Lucas County); and St. Louis, Missouri. These visits allowed delegations to learn about innovative models that are addressing welcoming topics such as community policing, workforce integration, community dialogue, secondary and higher education programs, and many other strategies that are building bridges between immigrants and the receiving community.

to feel they can be trusted. The refugee liaison also builds bridges with receiving community members, helping them recognize misunderstandings that may occur when a newcomer simply misunderstands the law, rather than doing something objectionable out of malice. The result of this approach has been an increased sense of community safety, as refugees feel more comfortable reporting crime and unlawful acts are prevented. The result is that while the number of

this approach has been an increased sense of community safety, as refugees feel more comfortable reporting crime and unlawful acts are prevented. A greater sense of cohesion and connectivity with the police and the community at large is the longer-term outcome, one that benefits all of the people of Boise.

The next phase of the exchange program will occur in September 2016, when delegations from the four U.S. cities that were hosts will travel to Germany to learn from their colleagues. Many will be curious about how Germans are establishing infrastructure to handle large numbers of asylum-seekers, addressing anti-refugee sentiment, and harnessing the incredible outpouring of volunteer support, among many other topics. How communities are adapting workforce systems and capitalizing on global talent to fuel their economies will also be of mutual interest. Learning from federal level policies and funding streams will be useful for U.S. practitioners operating in a country that has had a more *laissez faire* approach. Finally, good communication strategies, which send positive messages around the value of embracing our

A number of German participants in the Welcoming Communities Transatlantic Exchange found this model particularly interesting and are bringing the idea back to their hometowns to consider how it might be customized to meet their community needs.

diversity and the future of our communities, nations, and globe will be shared and adapted. Though the exchange is still at an early phase, over the course of the three-year effort we anticipate that a vibrant, innovative, overarching network of U.S. and German cities will emerge that can continue to utilize joint resources, serve as a sounding board for each other, and deepen their work in their respective countries as well as across the Atlantic. The results will be new action plans being developed that implement good ideas from each other's nations, new professional and personal relationships, and a renewed spirit of cooperation and partnership as the U.S. and Germany continue to serve as global leaders in a vibrant and inclusive welcoming movement.

Moving Forward

Efforts to connect welcoming work in Germany and the U.S. are still in an early phase, but the future of this transatlantic work is bright. This month, Welcoming America announced that through a partnership with the Bertelsmann Stiftung and Ashoka, it will be spending the next six months conducting a deeper analysis of current welcoming efforts in Germany. This will include examining which parts of the model hold most relevancy; what new adaptations might be made; and ways to strengthen, connect, and scale existing welcoming work across the country. This will involve examining the feasibility of establishing a Welcoming Germany city network to facilitate stronger connections among German Cities through:

- Ongoing exchanges and convenings among cities to facilitate peer learning
- A shared platform and tools focused on areas of common interest, such as communications/media relations and integration data

- The creation of common standards (such as Welcoming America's Welcoming Community Standards) to guide practice and potentially lay the groundwork for a future program of certification

- Potential partnerships and staffing

The world is on the move. While we need good migration policies to help manage this travel, it's in the best interest of all of us that people are set up for success upon their arrival. Stronger, unified countries, cities, and towns that embrace the diversity and talents of all their inhabitants will be positioned for greatness and a more robust democracy in the years ahead. This is the challenge and opportunity for Germany and the U.S. A continued transatlantic dialogue will help ensure the vibrancy of both nations' approach.

This Issue Brief is the result of an AICGS conference held in cooperation with Welcoming America and the Urban Institute in Washington, DC in May 2016 entitled “Welcoming Cities and the Migration Challenge.” Welcoming America inspires people to build a different kind of community — one that embraces immigrants and fosters opportunity for all. Because when communities welcome newcomers, they become better places for everyone. The goal is to create a tipping point in which immigrant welcome becomes the norm, with a critical mass of communities responding to demographic change not with fear and fragmentation, but with an appreciation of diversity as a wellspring of innovation, growth, and prosperity. As cities in the United States and Germany increasingly compete to attract talented people from around the globe and ensure they put down roots, and as local populations become more diverse, institutions and communities that make themselves more inclusive gain a crucial competitive edge.

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