

## Fall Convention 2024

November 16 2024 – 10am – 5pm

Location: Bürgerräume Stuttgart-West at Bebelstraße 22, 70193 Stuttgart (accessible for people living with disabilities)

We warmly invite you to attend this year's fall convention on Saturday, November 16 2024 in Stuttgart. We are pleased to share with you the exciting and thematically diverse program for the day.

This year's central talk will focus on the tightening of European asylum law and which measures are being discussed and practiced already across the continent. Afterwards, you will have the chance to learn in-depth about current conditions in Syria, avenues of support for refugees living with mental health conditions, church asylum, and racism at Ausländerbehörden (foreigners' registration offices). There will be two rounds for each of these topics. Finally, our panel of experts will discuss the mandatory payment card for refugees and its introduction during our panel discussion. There will be adequate time between each of the workshops and talks to network and discuss among participants.

The convention is free to attend and is, first and foremost, aimed at people volunteering and working with refugees.

There will be a vegan lunch meal, on-site childcare as well as interpretation for non-German speakers (German-English and German-Arabic).

We seek to create a space that is safe for all participants. To ensure this, we ask all attendees to read our [Code of Conduct](#) and to embrace these guidelines.

### Timeline:

09:45 am: Registration and arrivals

10:00 am: Introduction

10:15 – 11:30 am: Main talk: Sealing off Europe

The Italian government has started building extraterritorial camps for refugees in the nation of Albania, in the Netherlands there are plans to stop all social benefits payments for asylum seekers, Poland wants to temporarily suspend the right to asylum, and Germany has expanded and tightened border controls at its EU-internal borders.

These are only a select few examples of current trends in European politics on asylum. All of which we see happen despite there having been a reform of and a tightening of the The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in April 2024. This reform has not been adopted into national law in many of its aspects, but aimed to provide the legal foundation of practices already in place at EU borders for years.

Are these more restrictive measures sensible parts in a strategy to thwart the shift to the far right in European politics? And how can we counteract this logic of isolation? Hannah Sommer will explore these questions in her talk. She has most recently been part of the SOLiDi (Solidarity in Diversity) Projects at the University of Vienna, Austria.

Speaker: Hannah Sommer (University of Vienna)

11:30am – 1:00 pm: Round 1 – *Topics in depth*

Please choose one of the following four subjects:

### **Talk 1: The current conditions in Syria**

Within Germany, Syria is mostly discussed in the context of refugees' deportations. The violent suppression of the Syrian revolution, and the continued repression by Assad's regime which have forced more than half of Syria's population to flee have all but disappeared from German public discourse. At the same time, politicians paint a picture of Syria as a pacified country in which there are at least some safe areas. In contrast to this, there are reports of crimes against human rights, repression, political persecution, torture, and continued bombings. What is the actual reality in Syria?

Adopt a Revolution (AaR) was founded in 2011 in the face of the brutal response by the Assad government to the peaceful protests against its practices. AaR was established by Syrian and German activists. This movement for solidarity and human rights supports non-violent projects in Syria working against the dictatorship and advocates for justice and peace.

Speaker: Members of Adopt a Revolution

### **Talk 2: Structures of support for refugees with mental health issues**

Many refugees are under psychological stress or suffer live with mental health conditions. The path to receiving a diagnosis and psychological and medical support is one of great difficulty. Factors include residence status, language barriers, a lack of medical personnel, and inaccessible structures in the administrative processes.

In this group, we will focus on mental health conditions and support structures which already exist such as facilities, advice centers and medical services. A thematic swerve to the subjects of psychosis and addiction is possible based on interest in the group. Britta Schymura and Jochen Greiner work with refugees living with mental health conditions in Stuttgart.

Speakers: Britta Schymura and Jochen Greiner (Caritas Stuttgart)

### **Working group 3: Church asylum: Can deportation be prevented in cases of extreme hardship?**

Refugees whose applications for asylum were rejected based on the Dublin-regulations desperately seek the avenue of a church asylum. They are, often times rightfully so, afraid that once they are deported to a different European country they cannot expect a fair and just asylum procedure. In such cases of extreme hardship church asylums can be an option to move the BAMF to do another and more detailed case review.

But what are the steps necessary towards a church asylum? What difficulties and questions arise in the process?

Speaking from practical experience, experts from two projects will share with us, how they successfully get cases into church asylums, what motivates their work, which challenges they

face and where to find support. Church asylum is a feasible goal – this is a space for you to connect, get practical insight, share concerns and receive helpful tips.

Speakers: Theresa Lennartz & Markus Klumpp (Freiburg), Bärbel Neef & Gabriele Koch (Lahr)

#### Working group 4: Racism within Ausländerbehörden (Foreigners' registration office)

Long queues, overworked case handlers and communication in a tone that is often brash and overly direct are, unfortunately, key characteristics of the reality at Ausländerbehörden. For refugees the mandatory visits to these government offices can become a nightmare. This is because of institutional racism. What does this term mean? How does institutional racism play a role in Ausländerbehörden? What does that mean for those victimized by racism? And, are there ways to counteract racist practices and to support those affected? This work group will furthermore provide a space to share personal experiences and to connect with other participants. Johannes Siegel and Josephin Wandt are researchers in the field of institutions and racism (InRa).

Speakers: Johannes Siegel (Legal expert and co-founder of the Refugee Law Clinic Konstanz) and Josephin Wandt (Sociologist and lecturer at the Police Academy Hamburg)

1:00 pm: Lunch

2:00 pm – 3:15 pm: Panel discussion: *The payment card for refugees*

The introduction of a mandatory payment card for refugees has been the subject of controversial public discussion. The card is being described as a way to relieve public administration offices of pressure while guaranteeing payments to refugees. It is bound to be officially introduced statewide soon. This new instrument and its legality have been heavily contested and it has been called problematic for practical reasons. First trials with the card in real-life have sparked backlash. Critics point to the discriminatory and exclusionary dynamics the card causes and courts have received the first wave of lawsuit. The card puts a limit on withdrawing cash, can at times only be used within geographical limits and its use causes fees to the cardholders. In this discussion, we want to speak about the payment card and its legal foundation, its practical application and the criticisms aimed at its introduction.

Panelists: Andrea Kothen (Pro Asyl), Jürgen Kraft (former head of the Office for Refugees and Integraon Biberach); Kampagne Offen! München (invited)

Moderator: Joachimi Glaubitz (Refugee Council Baden-Württemberg)

This panel discussion is taking place in cooperation with Seebrücke Stuttgart.

3:15 pm: Break

3:30 – 5:00 pm: Round 2 – *Topics in depth*

Please choose one of the following four subjects:

Talk 1: The current conditions in Syria

Talk 2: Structures of support for refugees with mental health issues

Working group 3: Church asylum: Can deportation be prevented in cases of extreme hardship?

Working group 4: Racism within Ausländerbehörden (Foreigners' registration office)

Our fall convention is taking place within the project "Aktiv für Integration", supported by the Ministry for Social Issues, Health and Integration from public state funds as enacted by the Baden-Württemberg parliament. Co-funding is provided by the UN Refugee Aid and the Deutsche Postcode Lottery.