

From the Report of a Housing Allocator in Bielefeld: Problems in the Resettlement of Refugees from Camps to Confiscated Housing (1946)

Abstract

One of the greatest social problems in postwar Germany was providing the population with housing. The German authorities assigned refugees to excess rooms in undestroyed apartments and houses. As this 1946 report from Bielefeld's Refugee Housing Office makes clear, refugees were often harassed by landlords who were unwilling to share the available resources.

Source

Today, the refugees often find an empty or near-empty room. That they have to sleep on the floor and have no place to store their meager belongings is something they accept with bitterness. But something that hardly anyone can take is that they are not even allowed to cook. Let us assume that no use of the kitchen is provided for; it would still be the moral duty of the landlord to let the refugee prepare his scanty meals in the kitchen, at least until his own stove is available. What is the refugee supposed to do? No oven, no stove, no fuel. Go to the public soup kitchen? Perhaps march from Sonderburgerstraße all the way to the city with a baby in his arms? The allocator is pushing for use of the kitchen. People go along for the moment, and a short while later the refugees are sitting in the 55er barracks and are asking to be resettled, since the landlord has kicked them out of the kitchen again. The landlord says: the refugee uses too much gas, and other such things.

Source: Problems in the Resettlement of Refugees from Camps to Confiscated Housing, Excerpt from the Report of a Housing Allocator in Bielefeld, 1946, Stadtarchiv Bielefeld, Bestand 103,2/Hauptamt, Nr. 232; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte 1945–1955*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, pp. 358–59.

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