

Report about the Foundation Phase of the Refugee Law Clinic Siegen (Sept. 18, 2019)

Founding and Tasks

The Refugee Law Clinic Siegen was founded in the summer semester 2018 at the professorship for public law and international business law at the University of Siegen under the auspices of Prof. Dr. Jörn Griebel. The term *Law Clinic* describes a university education concept, which on the one side, gives students possibilities to practice their knowledge of the law as well as teaches important soft skills, and on the other side, it opens easy access to law consultancy for refugees.

Before founding, the vice-rector of studies, teaching, and teacher training at the University of Siegen, Mr. Prof. Dr. Michael Bongardt, gave an impact as an exchange of possibilities for an implementation of a (*Refugee*) *Law Clinic* in rector's office. Further participants were Prof. Dr. Jörn Griebel and Ulrike Hietsch (Faculty III) and the head of the student service, Philipp Schmidt. In this meeting was decided to create an information event for students to motivate interested students. This information event was planned for November 29, 2017. Jan Haas, as a representative of the *Refugee Law Clinic Cologne*, reported in front of around 50 participants about the structures and concepts of the *Refugee Law Clinic* of the University of Cologne. Many students have shown their interests at this event. Furthermore, it was necessary to raise the need for advice from refugees. For this purpose, on January 08, 2018, Ulrike Hietsch was the moderator for a speech between representatives of the rector's office (Mr. Prof. Dr. Bongardt, Ms. Dr. Schmalenbach), students (Dominik Schmidt and Milan Lingner) as well as representatives of social associations (esp. Ms. Kürschner of VAKS), of the city Siegen and the IHK. Also, in this context, we gained information about a high need for legal advice for refugees in Siegen-Wittgenstein. In February 2018, the rector's office and the faculty III decided to build a *Refugee Law Clinic* for a duration of three years. This RLC will be financed with a half job of a half research assistant position. This position was given to Jan Haas as project coordinator as of April 01, 2018. The first event took place on May 09, 2018. In the summer semester 2018, the first lessons in asylum and residence law were organized and held by Jan Haas, followed by first workshops in this context from Elke Dausacker, attorney-at-law, in autumn 2018. The first education cycle had its successful exam on October 30, 2018. As of this date, the first consultation hour in November was offered. The first official client in the subject of settlement permit was consulted in December 2018.

The legal advice of the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen* is free and is focused on refugees as well as (new) immigrants. The key competence of the students (of different studies – especially Business Law and Social Work) is to listen to the clients, explain to them the German law system as well as their personal rights. Furthermore, the students accompany the clients to authorities and help to assert their rights. The students will be prepared in the context of these tasks in content and method. After starting the consulting, a close relation and recurring supervision will be guaranteed by lawyers. A judicial representation will be not taken place by the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen*. In those necessities, we forward our clients to competent lawyers.

Education

In the summer semester, interested students were able to learn about the asylum and residence law for the third time in the context of an extracurricular engagement. In the first two education cycles, the lessons were held by Jan Haas. In this time, 22 consultants were taught and educated. Six of them are not active anymore because of several reasons. As of the summer semester 2019, our lawyer and expert of migration law Elke Dausacker, attorney-at-law, took over the tasks of Jan Haas and teaches the students in the asylum as well as residence law now. In the winter semester before, she already gave a case study training with integrated consulting simulations, which was parallel to our lesson. The students liked the case training. In the summer semester 2019, 16 students participated in the asylum and residence law lessons. Seven passed the exam.

For deepening the knowledge after finalizing the basic lessons and for actualizing the knowledge after legal changes, in a second module, we offered several workshops. But not only law context is important to consultants, psychological and intercultural knowledge is necessary, too. In the summer semester 2019, ethnology expert Judith Riepe, M.A., of the University of Tübingen held a workshop in “Migration law consultancy from an ethnological perspective” at the University of Siegen. Afterward, a scientific lecture from Dr. Constantin Hruschka from the Max Planck Institute for social law and social policy in Munich followed. This was about legal preconditions of withdrawal and revocation in review procedures of the BAMF. Furthermore, Jens Dieckman, attorney-at-law, from Bonn talked about current challenges and legal changes in the work with refugees. These events were visited by always around 31 participants (RLC consultants, external consultants (VAKS) and Caritas). In the next semesters, a workshop with diploma psychologist and psychotherapist Monika Schröder from the LVR Clinic Düsseldorf is planned with the topic „Flight and Trauma”.

Consultancy

The educated consultants of the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen* are offering a weekly consultation hour as of December 2018 in the rooms of the University on campus US. Until now, 29 clients were looking for help. Four cases were not assumed, eleven were completed or forwarded to our lawyers. 14 cases are in consulting and are served by our team. Our team is working with a four-eyes principle and the teams are mixed interdisciplinary. The focus of our consultancy is primarily in asylum law (especially about the review procedure of the BAMF, where accepted refugees were checked after years), about family reunion and the right to stay. Also, the support by the social welfare office and the mediation to medical and psychological help are tasks of our consultants.

For quality assurance reasons, the supervision takes place regularly. The supervision was held by Jan Haas until the summer semester 2019. Afterward, Elke Dausacker, attorney-at-law, ensured that the supervision took place. In the supervision meeting, students can raise questions about their case and talk about their ideas. Further procedures and possible solutions are discussed. Since May 2019, the consultants of the VAKS Siegen are participating in the supervision. This interdisciplinary exchange is a win-win situation for all parties. Furthermore, Thomas Molsberger, expands this exchange as of October 2019 as the new head of supervision.

Public Relations and Networking

For getting attention to the project and our consultancy hours, we were strengthening the public relations work at the beginning of the year. Next to flyers and posters, we made an advertisement in local media like the radio Siegen, the Westphalia Post as well as MiGazette (Migration and integration magazine of Siegen) about our advice offer. Additionally, we started to build a network with all integration actors of the city Siegen and the region. Especially, the work with the consultants of the VAKS Siegen is very positive for our members of the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen*. They are important contact persons and welcomed guests at our workshops and meetings.

Also, the cooperation with the International Office of the University of Siegen and with the AStA was strengthened to build better support in residence questions in front of the relevant immigration authority and to improve better communication between the University and the city of Siegen.

Beyond local networking, our consultants are on events in whole Germany, e.g. on events of the umbrella association or on regional conferences from other RLCs to gain new contacts and integrate them into our network. Therefore, representatives of the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen* were participating in the federal congress of the RLCs in 2018 and 2019 in Weingarten. Additionally, they participated in a working group meeting in Berlin in November 2018 as well as in a regional meeting in Dortmund in May 2019.

Internal Organization

Thankfully, because of Christian Gerhus (coordinator Uni-Start for new immigrants in department 6.4), and because of the support in the context of “Welcome” projects of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen* was able to recruit two student research assistants, who are working for the RLC with great commitment. They are coordinating the consultancy hour and support in administrative tasks.

After relevant preparations, we have founded the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen e.V.* officially in spring 2019. On March 27, 2019, twelve members of the RLC have met to create a statute and to vote the board. Since then, the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen* exists independently and the students have more responsibilities. Founding board members are Nathalie Vinders, Devrim Koyunbasoglu, and Janina Harms. The informal responsibilities were addressed by different resorts now: Financials and Membership Administration, Internal Organization, Data Protection, Education, Public Relations, Networking. Every resort has a head (Financials & Membership Administration: Janina Harms, Internal Organization: Devrim Koyunbasoglu, Data Protection: Hannah Poqué, Education: Ines Winkler, Public Relations: Nathalie Vinders, Networking: Belal Habibullah).

To appreciate the extracurricular engagement of the students and to strengthen the teamwork, we established leisure activities. After the Christmas party of the *Refugee Law Clinic Siegen* in December 2019, also the summer party in August 2019 was visited very well and therefore successful. Additionally, the team of internal organization has a monthly regular table to strengthen the sense of community and the sustainability of the project.

Signed by Haas, Griebel, August/September 2019