

Private Decisions, Public Results: German Business Action in Response to the Refugee Crisis

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Abstract : This article examines how large German companies have responded to the 2014 refugee crisis. It challenges the assumption that the historical legacy of implicit CSR in Germany would lead to low levels of business response through CSR channels. Instead, and building on institutional CSR and the converging forces of globalization, this article argues that the urgency of a humanitarian crisis creates incentives, in the absence of formal institutional arrangement, for explicit CSR responses. This explorative research encompasses the 53 German companies presented on 2015 Forbes2000. A qualitative content analysis of corporate websites was supplemented with inquiry e-mails. Results indicate considerable evidence for the main hypothesis, showing a vast majority of companies responding to the refugee crisis. Levels of engagement varied, depending on the phase of the crisis, from core-business activities to non-integrated action. The high level of partnerships with the state and other non-state actors indicates a quest for enhanced legitimacy in the face of an absent democratic mandate.

Keywords : corporate social responsibility (CSR), implicit versus explicit CSR, public-private partnerships, European refugee crisis

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