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The increased refugee movements to Germany between late summer 2015 and spring 2016 is an example for a phenomenon that seemed to come unexpected and had a long-lasting appearance. This led to a number of huge challenges in terms of sufficient registration, supply and shelter of more than a million people. Besides coping with the circumstances, involved organizations and local authorities had to fulfil tasks they were not used to. Relevant stakeholders instantly operate at full capacity and formed ad hoc networks to tackle the overwhelming situation in cooperative approaches. However, these challenging circumstances were actually not new in its nature, but do not occur regularly. More than 20 years earlier, high numbers of refugees, primarily from the civil war in former Yugoslavia, arrived in Germany. In 2015, meanwhile, very little knowledge from these experiences was available for the stakeholders, which was why they had to start their work quite unprepared and more or less from zero. Empirical findings and experience from workshops with practitioners indicate that knowledge and insights gained from past situations like this are only available in an insufficient form, because they lack appropriate resources (e.g., technical capabilities, personnel, strategies) to document and capture the developed knowledge afterwards as well as to evaluate it for further use and transfer. From our point of view, conditions like this lead to a kind of "knowledge crisis" that also seems to be manifested in the current pandemic.

On the one hand, knowledge management is often seen as a promising tool for prediction, prevention, preparedness and management of "unforeseen" crises. On the other hand, traditional scientific knowledge management models (e.g. the knowledge spiral) are often considered as too abstract for practical application. Against this backdrop, the contribution will take a closer look at the question, "What are obstacles and opportunities to consider when aiming for development of a practical and acceptable knowledge management approach for crisis management actors?" In order to discuss this question, the contribution presents empirical results on knowledge management in and between organizations involved in the refugee situation in 2015/16. The data was collected within the project "Security Cooperations and Migration (SiKoMi)" funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Results from interviews with representatives from police, public administration and private security will be presented as well as the transferability to the current pandemic and future situations.

Knowledge management and "unforeseen crises"