

# Finding a Shortcut Through the Bureaucratic Jungle

## Magdeburg start-up Visaright speeds up the process of hiring foreign professionals

There is no denying that many businesses are in need of professionals. Caregivers, IT experts and other types of professionals from abroad are more in demand than ever before. But there are some major bureaucratic hurdles that make it difficult for highly-qualified applicants to pursue their career in Germany. Andreas Kopysov has first-hand experience of these difficulties. The Russian-born former government official is helping to speed up procedures and digitalize processes with his start-up in Magdeburg. His work is currently proving particularly attractive to businesses because of the pandemic.

Back in spring, the coronavirus sent shock waves through many businesses. What was already difficult enough became practically unworkable: it was now almost impossible for professionals to come to Germany. At the start of the pandemic, borders were closed, travel was out of the question and many firms decided to introduce a hiring freeze. The number of visas being issued in Germany has reduced dramatically. "This is the very moment when we need specialists, particularly in IT," says Andreas Kopysov. "The crisis has laid bare the lack of digitalization in Germany. We have some catching up to do." Software developers, programmers and IT specialists had long been scarce even before now. Kopysov explains that other sectors are also desperately short of professionals. But what hasn't changed is the bureaucracy and long processing times that make it very difficult for foreign applicants to access job vacancies quickly. But Kopysov's company Visaright GmbH is speeding up the processing of visa applications and supporting applicants and businesses. He says: "I'm fighting against bureaucracy and for digitalization."

### From consular official to businessman

Kopysov knows exactly what he's talking about. Now a Berliner, the CEO of Visaright moved from Russia to Germany in 1993 and experienced firsthand how "decisions are often made at snail's pace." His career led him to the Federal Foreign Office and to numerous German embassies where he processed visa applications and developed strategies for speeding up processes through digitalization. He met people whose fate was in the hands of public authorities and saw how companies were fighting for skilled workers while falling at every bureaucratic hurdle. "There must be a better way of doing this," he said to himself. He gave up his position as a government official and founded his company in 2018 in Berlin. In his newly fledged company, he picked up where he had left off in the consulate – processing visa applications (although this time no asylum applications). But it is different to his work as a government official: Kopysov is trying to demonstrate on the free market how digital progress can function in the context of public authority services if it is organized with an enterprising focus.

### Supporting applicants with software, legal assistance and advice

As the CEO of the legal tech start-up, he supports both applicants and businesses. The foundation for this support is a software that in-house developers got up and running. It allows Visaright to offer all services that are based on bureaucratic processes. Processes that would otherwise take months are reduced to just a few weeks. "We've found a way to navigate the bureaucratic jungle," says Kopysov. That jungle is dense and perilous. There are more than 120 different types of visa in Germany. "It feels like there are thousands of forms, lots of requests for evidence and countless appointments," he says, "even though we now have a new law on skilled immigration." This law was passed a year ago by the German Federal Parliament and came into force in March 2020. According to the German government, it aims to help Germany "attract more qualified professionals from around the world." Kopysov has seen little evidence of this in his day-to-day work. "Although companies are heavily dependent on professional workers, they still come up against long waiting times," he says. He tells of the complicated steps that public authorities go through even if all the necessary evidence has been submitted, such as sending letters by post to employment agencies on the other side of the world and producing forms containing errors as a result of analog working methods. Visaright estimates that it has already helped 300 professionals access their dream job while also alleviating the shortage of skilled workers. Its software support is supplemented by legal and consulting services.

### Giving a boost to the key issue of skilled workers in Saxony-Anhalt

Since the start of this year, Visaright has been making inquiries, winning over potential immigrants and future employers with its rapid processes and now supports around 70 businesses in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg and Saxony-Anhalt. "Demand is high, and we have grown fast," says Kopysov. When looking for an investor, he came across bmp Ventures AG, which is now supporting the start-up with IBG funds from the Beteiligungsgesellschaft Sachsen-Anhalt. "This is a great place for us to do business," says Kopysov. They soon found suitable office space in the center of Magdeburg and quickly built up their contacts. Together with the Investment and Marketing Corporation Saxony-Anhalt, the CEO is currently planning to connect with different economic developers in the state "to become even more established at grassroots level and to give a boost to the important issue of skilled workers in this area." The Magdeburg-based firm now has 18 employees whose job it is to ensure their services are constantly being developed. Many of them work remotely, which is a part of the company philosophy. Kopysov explains: "Digitalization makes so many things possible: it's just a matter of us all making use of these things." His start-up shows how it's done. Its software allows its users to look for somewhere to live, apply for health insurance and open bank accounts as needed. They will soon be able to use a kindergarten service, too.

Hotline: Visaright is digitally connected with a public authority

The team is currently celebrating a breakthrough: Visaright is the first company to become digitally connected with a public authority, an achievement helped along by a law introduced in Germany requiring national, state and local administrations to provide their services digitally by the end of 2022. The firm now has a "hotline" to the Berlin immigration office. "This is a first step," says Kopysov, who knows that visa decisions based on analog processes can often take up to one and a half years. Visaright says that it can reduce the process to an average of two months. There have apparently even been cases where everything was sorted in just a week. How do they manage it? "We step up where there are bureaucratic snags, make the most of our technology, are persistent in our phone calls, offer advice and logistical support – we use all means available to us," says Kopysov.

### Giving the business a European focus

Demand for Visaright's services is only growing. "In September we had more inquiries than ever before because of the coronavirus crisis," says Kopysov, who wants to expand Visaright's portfolio. The company plans to cover the entire range of different visa types, expand the business with a European focus and develop the software to include more services. Kopysov explains that he and his team also want to carry on campaigning on a political level to make administrative processes less bureaucratic. The tendency for applicants to back out due to frustratingly long waiting times and for professionals to take their much-needed skills to other countries where processes are much simpler should be a thing of the past. One company in Saxony-Anhalt is thrilled to have recently hired a Cuban software developer. It had battled for months to employ him before turning to Visaright. "He'll be arriving any day now," says Kopysov.

Author: Manuela Bock/IMG Saxony-Anhalt

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