

## Doctoral Research Group 046

# Neglected Topics in Refugee Studies

## Aim and Programme of the Doctoral Research Group

### 1 Research focus

Several narrative surveys on refugee research in Germany confirm that there is no shortage of empirical studies on the subjects of flight and asylum (DifU 2016, SVR 2016). It should be noted, however, that this research is selective. In recent years, the empirical research on refugees conducted in Germany has mainly focused on two target groups: on the one hand, there has been considerable empirical research into the living situation of refugee children and youths – probably because these age groups are extremely vulnerable and require special social protection. On the other, countless studies exist on adult refugees of working age, as rapid integration into the labour system is a key requirement for social participation.

The research into social inequality and the official social reports (BMAS 2013a, b) confirm time and time again that there are a number of “vulnerable groups” in Germany, who particularly struggle to achieve full social integration, regardless of their residence status: people with disabilities, single parents, long-time unemployed, people with a low level of education, and elderly people. To date, however, refugee studies has – at most – only touched very briefly on the specific living situations, education, employment, and support needs of refugees and tolerated persons belonging to one of these “risk groups”. The planned Collaborative Research Training Group (RTG) therefore wishes to develop the empirical knowledge on such “neglected” fields of refugee studies with exploratory surveys; scientific qualification work is excellently suited to this purpose.

### 2 Research programme and fields of research

With the expertise contributed by the researchers involved in the RTG, four “neglected” areas will be investigated initially: disability, illiteracy, sexual orientation, and delinquency. The RTG shall consider the objective and normative exclusion risks that refugees and tolerated persons with a specific impairment are (or may be) subject to in the individual use of general and vocational education and qualification offers as well as the accompanying advice and

educational support. Inclusion measures that (can) effectively help to mitigate these exclusion risks in the educational and social work will also be investigated.

#### **Exclusion risk: Disability**

One group that is very “neglected” in refugee studies are refugees and tolerated persons with a physical, mental or psychiatric impairment. A disability can arise during flight, whereby people sometimes develop a severe physical or psychiatric impairment. A disability can also be a reason for flight if the medical care in a country devastated by civil war collapses. A disability is a barrier to integration in the country of asylum, as workers of able body and mind tend to be sought. The ability of family members to work may also be impaired. A disability can justify a right of residence if access to the necessary medication cannot be guaranteed in the country of origin.

The status of being *disabled* in the sense of social law is confirmed in the disabled person’s pass (*Schwerbehindertenausweis*). This is issued by the responsible benefits office (*Versorgungsamt*) following an assessment and on the condition that the person in question has their habitual residence in Germany pursuant to § 30 para. 1 of Book One of the German Social Code (SGB I). Given that refugees are not included in the relevant statistics, there are neither any estimates nor any reliable data on affected asylum seekers and tolerated persons with disabilities. A legal report we commissioned revealed that while there is no blanket exclusion of migrants with disabilities from the benefits provided for in the German Social Code, exclusions do arise from a specific residence status, date of entry, stay duration or individual types of benefits (Weiser 2016).

The consequences of this social legislation, which is restrictive in parts, are investigated in the very first studies on migrants with disabilities with relatively certain residency status. However, the exclusion risk of “disabilities” is entirely neglected in refugee studies and, to date, the research into special needs education has avoided any consideration of the participation risk of “flight”.

#### **Exclusion risk: illiteracy**

Substantial theoretical and applied contributions were developed during two major research and development programmes on illiteracy and basic education in Germany (2007–2015) funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) (Grosche & Schroeder 2013). However, no projects were funded on the subjects of flight and asylum. The “new” definition of functional illiteracy developed during the programme also excludes migrants (Egloff & Seukwa 2013). The 2014 “leo.” study on the extent of illiteracy in Germany only interviewed migrants, who were sufficiently competent in their second language to be able to follow a 20 to 30-minute interview (cf. Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2014). As a consequence, the quantitative overview on illiteracy is incomplete for some sections of immigrant groups.

For access to the government-funded integration courses has not been regulated for tolerated persons, people granted residency for humanitarian reasons or asylum seekers, and they therefore also do not have access to literacy and basic education (Gag 2016). At the same time, since 2002, programmes such as EQUAL have facilitated what were previously isolated attempts by EU member states to offer basic education to adults in the asylum procedure in cooperation with refugee organisations, state and national authorities, schools and educational establishments, social services and businesses in order to establish diverse advice, education, professional qualification and social support services (Schroeder & Seukwa 2007; Gag 2014).

While the educational quality of the offers of work-related literacy and basic education still requires investigation, measures to enhance quality are also rare (Gag 2016). As previously mentioned, the educational science research has so far barely considered the specific learning requirements and educational needs of illiterate refugees, whereby particularly the didactics for literacy courses (so-called “Alpha courses”) under the condition of multilingualism are entirely neglected. There is no empirical research on the asylum-specific basic education offers.

#### **Exclusion risk: Sexual violence**

There are injustices in German asylum law that particularly affect women and sexual minorities (Friebertshäuser et al. 2007). Hence investigations into sexual violence are kept secret to avoid shame and injury or prevent (re)traumatisation. As a topic that is “neglected” overall, the investigation of experiences of sexual violence is often limited to the situation of female victims (Thielen 2009). In refugee residences, for example, particularly assaults on children and women are made public, although it can be assumed that male refugees are also victims of sexual violence by other refugees or members of staff (regardless of their sexual orientation, though particularly if they are homosexual).

In pioneering studies, Thielen (2009) presented what is to date the only systematic investigation into the living situation of sexual minorities in the German asylum system – using the example of homosexual men from Iran. Empirical reflection on the relationship between heteronormativity and social, cultural and religious diversity in educational facilities is important in educational science. In social work, the question is the same in residences and centres for young people as it is in residences for refugees – if the criticism is justified that the socially established system of heterosexuality is reproduced in the education and social support systems.

#### **Exclusion risk: delinquency**

The police crime statistics of 2014 and 2015 show a marked increase in non-German crime suspects. This can be attributed to the growing number of refugees, readiness to report crimes and awareness among the general public (BMI 2015, BKA 2016). It can be seen that the exclusion risk of imprisonment due to delinquency has risen tremendously among people with uncertain or no residency status. Arrest warrants are issued for these population groups more rapidly and the readiness to report crimes is higher when they are committed by “non-Germans”. In German prisons, a widespread “xenophobic atmosphere” is perceived both among inmates and between inmates and the detention facility staff (Spindler & Tekin 2003).

No scientific knowledge exists on the effects of prison sentences on people traumatised by forced migration, persecution or war either. However, empirical knowledge is available on the retraumatisation of refugees by state authorities (Egger 2003) or due to life in collective accommodation (Schreiber et al. 2006). Regardless of their age, sex or origin, prison inmates often adapt – also negatively – to the conditions of life in prison (2014).

Education, employment and living space are decisive elements to prevent inmates from reoffending following their release, and these aspects must be taken into account during the transition within the penal system or the offers of the prison and probationary services (DBH 2010). The conditions for transition management – i.e. the preparation of inmates for release from the penal system provided by the state – is particularly precarious for these groups though. The question of where exactly inmates should be released to often cannot be answered satisfactorily, for example. This problem is exacerbated by the limited access to

work and training for refugees provided for in the asylum and residency legislation as well as by language barriers.

### 3 Possible topics for the scientific qualification work

The doctoral projects should be oriented to the key issues outlined in the aforementioned four “neglected” fields of research. Projects can

- (1) investigate the individual *living situations* and subjective experiences of tolerated persons and refugees within the asylum procedure;
- (2) analyse the responses of the *institutions* responsible for providing accommodation, care, advice, supervision, education, support, rehabilitation, resocialisation and professional integration with regard to asylum-relevant exclusion risks;
- (3) critically examine the implementation of *strategies for action* for educational and social support in the establishments dealing with refugees in the respective field of study;
- (4) use data to reflect on the *regional particularities* of “neglected” topics of refugee studies.

### 4 Teaching concept of the structured doctoral programme

The Collaborative Research Training Group offers a three-year programme for specialist qualification comprising a series of components that build on one another (see overview below). The qualification concept consists of a mandatory programme, and an optional field to ensure qualified supervision on the one hand and avoid overloading on the other as well as guarantee an individual orientation.

#### Overview: teaching and qualification programme during the doctoral phase

Semester	Specialist qualification (mandatory courses)	Key scientific skills/career planning (optional)
1	<p><b>Jour fixe:</b> Fortnightly; scholarship holders, programme coordinators, professors; in Hamburg</p> <p><b>Workshop 1:</b> Introduction to the research programme of the Research Training Group (in Hamburg)</p> <p><b>Research colloquium I:</b> Detailed dissertation planning (preparation of exposés)</p>	<p>Workshops on methodology and methods (access to Research Training Group offers)</p> <p>Participation in lectures</p> <p>Participation in international conferences</p>
2	<p><b>Jour fixe:</b> Fortnightly; scholarship holders, programme coordinators, professors; in Hamburg</p> <p><b>Workshop 2:</b> Refugee work in Regensburg (theory-practice transfer)</p> <p><b>Research colloquium II:</b> Development of survey, documentation and evaluation instruments</p>	<p>Coaching and applications for (inter)national expert conferences</p> <p>Preliminary publication of own findings</p>
3	<p><b>Jour fixe:</b> Fortnightly; scholarship holders, programme coordinators, professors; in Hamburg</p> <p><b>Workshop 3:</b> Refugee work in Dresden (theory-practice transfer)</p> <p><b>Research colloquium III:</b> Discussion of pilot surveys</p>	
4	<p><b>Jour fixe:</b> Fortnightly; scholarship holders, programme coordinators, professors; in Hamburg</p> <p><b>Workshop 4:</b> Refugee work in Kassel (theory-practice transfer)</p> <p><b>Research colloquium IV:</b> Comparative discussion of preliminary empirical findings</p>	
5	<p><b>Jour fixe:</b> Fortnightly; scholarship holders,</p>	

	programme coordinators, professors; in Hamburg <b>Workshop 5:</b> Refugee work in Emden (theory-practice transfer) <b>Research colloquium V:</b> Contributions by individual dissertation to the overall research programme	International RTG conference (in cooperation with Bremen and Oldenburg)
6	<b>Jour fixe:</b> Fortnightly; scholarship holders, programme coordinators, professors; in Hamburg  <b>Completion of the dissertation</b>	

Throughout the entire three years, a two to three-hour *jour fixe* will be held every fortnight during the semester and, where necessary, also during the reading period. Attendance is mandatory for all doctoral students. Participation by other university staff involved in the RTG is desired, but not obligatory.

At the start of the doctoral programme, an *introductory workshop* (1) will be held with all professors involved in the Collaborative Research Training Group. This three-day event will provide an overview of the RTG programme as well as the individual dissertation projects, and thus create a joint theoretical and methodological basis for all RTG members.

Further *workshops* (2–5) will be held in the subsequent semesters at each of the participating universities in turn. The theoretical-practical relevance of the RTG will be established during these three-day events. Students will have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with refugee facilities, learn about different practical educational and social work projects, and enter into discussions with local stakeholders in refugee work and refugee policy during the respective workshop. All those involved in the Collaborative Research Training Group should be given the opportunity to learn more about the German “asylum landscape” of education and support services.

A three-day *research colloquium* (I–V) will be held in Hamburg once every semester. These colloquiums will be oriented to the dissertation work process. The first colloquium will focus on refining the individual research projects and preparing the exposés. In the subsequent colloquiums, methodological questions can then be discussed and the different doctoral projects presented. The final two colloquiums will ensure the respective dissertation’s contribution to the research programme of the Collaborative Research Training Group. To enable doctoral students to concentrate on writing up their dissertation, there will not be any required courses in the sixth semester.

The members of the Collaborative Research Training Group are able to participate in a variety of training courses offered by the research training groups, centres for university education and further training, and career centres of the participating higher education institutions to acquire key skills. These offers are used to develop the individual qualification plans.

The Collaborative Research Training Group will endeavour to organise workshops on methods relevant to the research programme for the first semester. While not mandatory, attendance is recommended to ensure the quality of empirical research. The teaching programme will also be complemented with guest lectures.

The scholarship holders will be supported financially to facilitate their participation in national and international conferences and/or presentation of their projects there. The international conference of the Research Training Group will offer doctoral students further opportunities to present their projects to the scientific community.

From around the fourth semester, doctoral students should attend workshops on strategies for career planning in the versatile academic labour market both inside and outside universities as well as on publication strategies. Participation in these workshops is optional.

## 7. Literature

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## Information

<https://www.ew.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/vtdf/files/forschungsprogramm.pdf>

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