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## An empirical–analytical approach to the study of recent refugee migrants in Germany

**Abstract:** Given the recent surge in interest in refugee research, this editorial discusses whether the study of refugees' migration and integration requires entirely new theoretical and methodological approaches. We make the case that refugee migration is a special type of migration and that refugee integration is subject to similar laws and regularities as the integration of all kinds of immigrants. Therefore, it should be studied using conventional theoretical and analytical approaches to empirical–analytical migration and integration research. Obviously, special conditions of refugee migration apply, such as specific patterns of refugees' selectivity, health and resource endowment, settlement conditions, and reception or integration services. However, such peculiarities do not represent distinct mechanisms; they are simply background conditions for more general mechanisms. Contributions to this Special Issue, which all rely on new high-quality data from Germany, best highlight the universality of general mechanisms of immigrant integration, on the one hand, and the relevance of refugee migrants' specific characteristics and conditions, on the other hand.

**Keywords:** Refugees; Theoretical Approach; Empirical-analytical Approach; Germany

## Der empirisch-analytische Ansatz in der Forschung zur jüngeren Fluchtmigration

**Zusammenfassung:** Angesichts des wachsenden Interesses an der Fluchtforschung wird in diesem Editorial diskutiert, ob Fluchtmigration und die entsprechenden Integrationsprozesse mit völlig neuen theoretischen und methodischen Ansätzen behandelt werden müssen. Wir vertreten die Position, dass Fluchtmigration ein Sonderfall der Migration ist und die Integrationsprozesse daher ähnlichen Gesetzen und Regularien unterliegen wie die Integration jeglicher Art von Einwanderern. Daher sollten sie mit den üblichen theoretischen und empirisch-analytischen Ansätzen in der Migrations- und Integrationsforschung untersucht werden. Natürlich

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gelten bei der Fluchtmigration besondere Bedingungen, wie z. B. spezifische Muster der Selektivität, Gesundheit und Ressourcenausstattung sowie Regelungen für die Verteilung und Aufnahme von Flüchtlingen oder sonstige Maßnahmen. Solche Besonderheiten stellen jedoch selbst keine separaten Mechanismen dar, sondern sie sind Randbedingungen für allgemeinere Mechanismen. Die Beiträge zu diesem Sonderheft, die sich alle auf neue, hochwertige Datensätze für Deutschland stützen, machen einerseits die Universalität der allgemeinen Mechanismen der Integration von Zuwanderern deutlich. Auf der anderen Seite zeigen sie die Relevanz der spezifischen Merkmale und Bedingungen der Fluchtmigration.

**Stichworte:** Geflüchtete; Theoretischer Ansatz; Empirisch-analytischer Ansatz; Deutschland

## 1 Conceptualizing and understanding refugee migration and integration

In 2015 Germany famously opened its borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees, most of them fleeing war zones and refugee camps in neighbouring countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. The number of applications for asylum had been rising exponentially since 2009, and then peaked in 2016 (see Brücker/Kosyakova/Vallizadeh in this Special Issue). Scientific interest and engagement in refugee migration and integration in Germany has also grown tremendously, and has produced an unprecedented research boom. In 2016 the number of newly started projects was ten times higher than in 2011, and it is amazing how closely trends in new research projects and asylum applications parallel each other (Kleist et al. 2019: 8). While refugee research involves many disciplines, projects grounded in the social sciences (sociology in particular) represent the largest share (Kleist et al. 2019: 19).

This research boom has not yet been adequately reflected in the major German sociology journals. Of the 692 papers that appeared in the four German journals listed in the Social Science Citation Index, *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, *Soziale Welt*, and *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, between 2015 and 2019 only nine explicitly dealt with refugees. By contrast, at least 34 dealt with the more general topics of migration or post-migration-related integration processes. In the same time period—in 2017—a new journal, *The German Journal for Refugee Studies* (*Z'flucht. Zeitschrift für Flüchtlingsforschung*), was founded to engage in the interdisciplinary debate on refugee migration. With the growing interest in the topic and the expanding data infrastructure, the field of refugee studies should not become detached from the sociological mainstream migration and integration research or the empirical–analytical approach in general. Refugee migration should not be treated as a unique and unprecedented phenomenon that overrules or even ignores established paradigms and calls for entirely new theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding refugee movements and their integration.

FitzGerald and Arar (2018) in their Annual Sociological Review article also discuss the schism between traditional migration and integration research on the one hand, and the relatively new field of refugee studies on the other hand, which has its own research centres, professional associations and networks, and journals. They note that refugee studies rarely refer to the established scholarship of the sociology of international migration; they instead tend to promote a politicized agenda adopting the rhetoric of the ‘UNHCR [UN High Commissioner for Refugees] and advocacy knowledge producers’ (FitzGerald/Arar 2018: 400).

We fully agree with FitzGerald and Arar’s (2018: 388) general reasoning that refugee research should be conducted in close reference to general research on migration and integration—not least because it is difficult to clearly distinguish between refugees and migrants. Statements which emphasize that refugees are not migrants are often politically motivated, either to satisfy refugees’ need of aid and protection, for example from the UNHCR, or to question their permission and legitimation for a longer-term presence, like in right-wing populist statements. Migration research, however, has stressed that juxtapositions like voluntary vs. forced movements, or economic vs. political motivations, cannot be understood as dichotomies, but rather as the poles of different continua, and that their locations along these gradual continua can be context specific, overlapping, and change over time (Düvell 2006; Long 2013; Crawley/Skleparis 2018). Moreover, while the circumstances faced by refugees and other migrants might differ, albeit in a gradual manner, we argue that the mechanisms leading from these circumstances to various outcomes (e.g., placement within the labour market or the education system) are likely to be the same. Therefore, only systematic comparisons of refugee migrants with other categories of migrants can help us better understand the scope and limitations of the explanatory power of the underlying mechanisms. In other words, relating refugee research explicitly to theoretical frameworks and methods of more general migration and integration research is mutually beneficial. Relating ethnic inequality research to general social stratification research has similarly proven to be extremely fruitful for both fields.

This Special Issue promotes the benefits of studying refugees within the broader context of general migration and integration research, and presents examples of the state of empirical–analytical research on recent refugee migrants in Germany. We show that refugee integration does not require completely new theoretical and methodological tools. Refugee migration is a particular type of migration, and hence patterns of integration among refugees are expected to be subject to similar laws and regularities as the integration of other kinds of immigrants. While the special conditions associated with refugee migration, which influence refugees’ selectivity and resource endowment, as well as the unique characteristics of refugee settlement must be taken into account, they pertain to the background conditions of more general mechanisms and do not represent distinct mechanisms themselves. Thus conventional theoretical and analytical accounts used in past empirical

research on migration and integration can help better understand refugee migration.

The remainder of the editorial proceeds as follows. First, we outline a theoretical framework of immigrants' integration. Next, we summarize the state-of-the-art research on refugee migrants—which largely pertains to the Canadian, American, Dutch, Swedish and British contexts. From these studies, we identify conditions that are particularly relevant for understanding the processes involved in refugee migrants' integration and the responses of the host countries' established populations towards newcomers. We then briefly introduce the papers included in this Special Issue. We assume that a major reason for the relatively scarce coverage of refugee topics in German sociology journals has been a lack of high-quality data. We therefore describe new major German data sources on recent refugee migrants, which can and should be analysed to fill this gap. We conclude by highlighting how our general approach and recent empirical studies advance our understanding of patterns of refugee migration and integration, and suggest possible avenues of future research.

## 2 A theoretical framework of immigrants' integration

Integrating individuals into a society involves ensuring that they have adequate access to key resources, are embedded in various social spheres and mainstream institutions, have promising and adequate life chances, and are recognized as legitimate and socially accepted (Alba/Foner 2015). Integration is a matter of degree, and encompasses many aspects that do not necessarily correlate; it is common to subsume them under at least four broad dimensions, including structural, social, cultural and emotional integration (e.g., Esser 2001; Kalter 2008). The structural dimension captures the positioning within major institutions of receiving societies, like the education system or the labour market. The social dimension pertains to social interactions as well as inclusion in groups and social networks. The cultural and emotional dimensions include knowledge and skills, norms and values, beliefs, and identity. Integration research tends to emphasize the structural dimension, both because it is widely perceived to be a key determinant of the success of integration (Kalter 2008) and because good-quality data are more readily available for this dimension. The bulk of the analyses in this Special Issue likewise focus on the structural aspects of integration.

The extent of integration, in all dimensions and aspects, in principle applies to all members of a society. Nevertheless, in migration and integration research the discourse is often about the integration of specific groups, such as immigrants or refugee migrants, and their descendants. These studies analyse the extent to which an individual's migration experience, origin or heritage affects her/his access to resources, embeddedness in institutions, life chances and recognition, and whether specific minority groups are on par with the rest of society on average. This by no means

implies that all members of the reference population are fully integrated. Integration—even when focussing on particular groups—is always a multi-dimensional process involving efforts from both ingroup and outgroup members. This idea is stressed in both Segmented Assimilation Theory (Portes/Zhou 1993) and New Assimilation Theory (Alba/Nee 1997), which have consistently questioned major assumptions underlying classical assimilation theories concerning the one-sidedness of integration processes, the homogeneity of receiving societies and the upward, unidirectional and progressive character of assimilation. These newer theoretical developments suggest that a comprehensive understanding of integration requires conceptualizing it as a dynamic feedback process of interactions between different types of actors that involves the interplay between the receiving societies' opportunity structures on the one side, and individuals' resources and preferences, which determine their choice of opportunities, on the other side (Kogan 2016).

At the individual level, resources that are particularly relevant for integration are *human capital* (e.g., education, training, labour market experience) as well as cognitive and non-cognitive skills (e.g., motivational factors); *cultural capital* (e.g., language proficiency, acquaintance with culturally typical norms of behaviour and customs); and *social capital*, particularly as it relates to useful contacts within the receiving society. Immigrants are often disadvantaged with respect to many of these resources, partly due to the migration experience itself and partly, but not necessarily, due to (self-)selection processes in migration decision-making (see Spörlein/Kristen/Schmidt/Welker in this Special Issue). In addition to language and communication barriers, newcomers' individual resources might be of limited value due to difficulties associated with transferring them to the host country. Health is somewhat neglected within a resource-oriented framework, and yet is key to successful integration (Ager/Strang 2008). It is a prerequisite for regaining valuable resources and has been shown to be closely related to the chances of attaining employment and avoiding the risks of social exclusion (Ager/Strang 2008).

Immigrants, including refugee migrants, enter heterogeneous receiving societies. The degree of socio-economic and ethnic stratification, as well as the extent of ideological and political fragmentation of the receiving societies are likely to play a considerable role in determining immigrants' opportunity structures and hence their chances of successful integration. For instance, societies with firm socio-economic hierarchies tend to have lower rates of upward intergenerational mobility. Because immigrants often have lower socio-economic status than the majority population, they and their offspring are likely to face disadvantages in such societies. Likewise, socio-cultural or ethno-racial hierarchies easily perpetuate distinct ethnic and racial stereotypes and pronounced social distances. Intergroup relations affect not only the attitudes of the majority population toward migrants, but also migrants' perceptions of the mainstream majority groups, as well as the attitudes of established immigrants and immigrant offspring towards newcomers. The institutional characteristics of the host countries—particularly immigrant integration policies, labour

markets, education systems, and welfare regimes—are also likely to influence immigrants' integration prospects (e.g., Reitz 1998; Kogan 2007). The general climate of perception and acceptance, and the degree of prejudice and discrimination against the newcomers, are additional important factors that influence the pathways of integration.

### 3 What is special about refugee migration and how distinct are refugee migrants?

As argued above, the processes underlying the integration of *all* immigrants (including refugee migrants) are governed by the same basic mechanisms. However, the background conditions for these mechanisms may vary, sometimes considerably. This section outlines some of the most important differences in these conditions that have been elaborated in the literature. While it is often difficult to clearly distinguish between refugee migrants and other immigrants, refugee migrants are typically contrasted with so-called economic migrants, which is an idealized type in itself. Many of the arguments below should thus be understood as ideal–typical, and the empirical reality as a matter of degree rather than an either/or dichotomy.

The United Nations defines refugees as persons who are—due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion—outside the country of their nationality and are unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to be under the protection of that country.<sup>1</sup> Countries are required to receive refugees as a humanitarian obligation, in which economic considerations tend to play a minor role. Thus, refugee migration is far less controllable for immigrant-receiving countries than economic migration. Receiving countries can define the terms of economic migration and set up minimal migrant qualifications; they can also regulate the timing of migration based on domestic economic conditions. This is less the case for refugee flows. Hence Dustmann et al. (2017) characterize refugee migration as a 'forced marriage' rather than the 'chosen match' prevalent in conceptions of economic migration.

At the individual level, refugee migrants are treated as a special migrant group due to their distinct migration motives, circumstances and histories (Feller 2005; Phillimore 2011; Bakker et al. 2014). Referring to the theoretical framework introduced above, this plays a role in integration processes through the nature of resources, preferences and migrants' views of themselves. Non-humanitarian immigrants, especially economic migrants, can carefully plan their move, assumingly based on rational, though imperfect, cost–benefit calculations. As a consequence, they are more likely to possess ready-to-use resources, favourable socio-psychological predispositions, good health and to be overall more likely 'positively' self-selected for economic success and smooth social integration into the receiving society (Chiswick 2000).

1 See <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>.

Refugees and asylum seekers, by virtue of the circumstances of their escape from war-torn regions or flight from political, religious or ethnic persecution, are forced to leave their origin countries due to external events that endanger their lives or well-being (Dustmann et al. 2017). They are less likely to have immediately transferable skills and more likely to suffer from strain, stress, or mental or other health problems. Nevertheless, if there is a pool of potential receiving countries for refuge, refugees who choose to migrate to the Western hemisphere might also be driven by economic reasons and hence exhibit immigrant-typical higher selectivity for economic success compared to those who are resettled in neighbouring countries.

Importantly, the circumstances surrounding refugees' migration are likely to be much more traumatic than those of voluntary immigrants. Their pre-migration (such as traumatization by a threatening situation in the country of origin) and migration experiences (such as dramatic circumstances of escape), as well as their post-migration (legal) situation can significantly affect refugee migrants' *physical and mental health* (Allsop et al. 2014) and consequently their integration prospects (Beiser 2006; Jaschke/Kosyakova 2019; Jorden et al. 2009; Laban et al. 2004; Philimore 2011; Takeda 2000; Bakker et al. 2014).

Another important difference between economic and refugee migrants is their level of access to their country of origin (Cortes 2004). In contrast to the populist view that describes refugees as temporary guests and questions their need and will to integrate, refugee immigrants are often unable to return for a long, long time, due to persistent fears or the threat of persecution. Hence, they might have stronger *incentives to invest* in host-country-specific resources and long-term integration in the receiving country than many other immigrants do. This may take the form of greater drive to improve host-country language proficiency, enrol in education or training programs, and acquire host-country citizenship. Cortes (2004) argues that over time, refugees tend to have higher host-country-specific human capital investments than economic migrants.

Yet another common difference between these two immigrant groups is that refugee migrants are likely to have fewer physical social contacts with their home countries through return visits. Economic immigrants, on the other hand, might be actively involved in *transnational activities*, making frequent trips to their family members, relatives, and friends they left behind in the country of origin or sending remittances to them (Cortes 2004). Not to be disregarded is, however, the importance of internet and social media for maintenance of contacts with the country of origin; a frequent way of social interactions among refugees, which minimizes differences across the two groups.

Prior studies have found that *social networks* serve as major information channels that are likely to reduce the costs of migration (Koser 2002) and integration (Massey et al. 1998; Crisp 1999; Hein 1993; Koser 1997; Scalettaris 2007; Williams 2006). Indeed, the mass migration of asylum seekers to Europe in 2015 benefitted



from a surge in new kinds of social networks facilitated by technology. Facebook, Twitter, and other smartphone applications have become a main source of navigation for people on the move, providing them with reliable and up-to-date information on safe border crossings, shelter or accommodation possibilities, and employment opportunities (FitzGerald/Arar 2018).

A distinct peculiarity of refugee migration is the context of reception, which includes both the general attitudes of the host-country population towards refugee migrants (i.e., the welcome of the reception) and special efforts that receiving societies undertake to ensure their smooth settlement and integration (settlement and integration policies). For example, for decades the US government and US population have treated Cubans more favourably than other, linguistically and culturally similar, groups from Latin America (Portes/Bach 1985). Overall, the length and smoothness of the asylum procedure, the way asylum accommodation is organized, and the eventually granted residence status are important cornerstones of refugee migrants' integration (Bakker et al. 2014; Hainmueller/Hangartner/Lawrence 2016; Kosyakova/Brenzel in this Special Issue). For instance, a stay in an asylum centre is said to be associated with the fear of deportation and uncertainty about the duration and outcome of the procedure (Laban et al. 2004). Considerable insecurity about the future during the asylum procedure might impede a refugee's recovery from post-traumatic stress and slow down societal integration for recognized asylum seekers (Ghorashi 2005; Lomba 2010). Furthermore, limited rights during the asylum procedure might create unnecessary dependence, reduce confidence and foster passive attitudes among refugee migrants (Ghorashi 2005; Ryan et al. 2008). According to Bakker et al. (2014), the loss of control over one's own life and full dependence on state institutions are likely to lead to reduced motivation and hence to complicate the process of integration.

#### **4 How do patterns of integration among refugee migrants compare to those of other immigrant groups?**

Little rigorous and systematic empirical–analytical research has been conducted on the assumptions and hypotheses discussed above in relation to recent refugee migrants in Germany. The key message from integrational studies, largely carried out in the US, the UK, Canada, the Netherlands, and Sweden, is that, compared to other immigrant categories, refugee migrants have lower employment rates upon arrival in the host country, but tend to catch up over time (Bevelander 2016). The results are mixed, however, regarding the speed and extent of refugee integration. Some studies have found that refugee migrants catch up with other non-economic migrants over time (Connor 2010; for recent evidence on Germany see, Brücker/Jaschke/Kosyakova 2019), while others have concluded that refugees outperform other non-economic migrants (Cortes 2004). Relative labour market performance is also a subject of controversy: whereas some studies show that refugees have similar



employment levels (Hatton 2013; Bevelander 2011; de Vroome/van Tubergen 2010) and income trajectories (DeVoretz et al. 2004; Bevelander/Pendakur 2014) as other categories of non-economic immigrants, others report different outcomes for the two groups (Aydemir 2011; Wilkinson 2008). There is more agreement regarding comparisons of refugees and economic immigrants: the former tend to exhibit lower employment levels (DeVoretz et al. 2004) and lag behind in earnings trajectories (Connor 2010). Female refugees are reported to experience additional barriers when seeking access to language classes (Brahmbhatt et al. 2007), healthcare (Phillimore 2011) and employment (Dumper 2002; Cheung/Phillimore 2017).

Major explanations of these results resonate with the factors mentioned above, such as differences in immigrant selectivity, language proficiency, levels of human capital (education and labour force experience), relevant social contacts, mental and physical health issues, as well as the extent to which the asylum procedure helps or hinders the integration process (Bevelander 2016; Krahn et al. 2000). Licensing bodies' reluctance to recognize foreign educational and occupational credentials has been named a serious obstacle to refugees' integration in Canada (Aycan/Berry 1996; Swan et al. 1991), particularly among professionals (Basran/Zong 1998).

Explanations of the female-specific adverse outcomes are related to enhanced health concerns among women, which are often associated with experiences of undisclosed sexual violence (Pittaway/Bartolomei 2001), limited access to health care (Cheung/Phillimore 2017), a lack of affordable childcare facilities or special provisions for women (Koyama 2014), as well as traditional gender roles (Cheung/Phillimore 2017). For example, evidence from the UK suggests that although refugee women are more likely to participate in host-country language programs than men, they do it much later due to unaffordable childcare provision, problems fitting classes around school hours, the absence of single-sex classes and a lack of confidence about enrolling in formal education (Dumper 2002; Cheung/Phillimore 2017).

Institutional arrangements also play a role, insofar as government-assisted refugees are often located in municipalities in which housing is available but employment opportunities are scarce (Bevelander 2016). By contrast, economic immigrants often have the resources to settle where there are more job prospects, and family immigrants are likely to move close to their kin and to draw on social capital acquired by family and friends already residing in the country (Bevelander/Pendakur 2009). The internal migration of immigrants—particularly of refugees—has been found to increase the chances of obtaining employment (Bevelander 2016). Opportunity structures, including the structural conditions of the housing and labour markets, are hence important predictors of labour market integration. Larger cities, for example, often have larger co-ethnic populations; there are thus greater opportunities to access ethnic networks, which are generally helpful for finding employment in the initial stage of refugee settlement (Rooth 1999; Bevelander 2016).

## 5 How do established members of the receiving societies react to refugee migrants?

While empirical–analytical research on refugee migrants’ incorporation into different spheres of German society is still in its infancy, the surge in the inflow of refugees has triggered an increase in scholarly interest in the majority population’s attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers (Gerhards et al. 2016; Hangartner et al. 2019). Contrasting public opinion trends have been reported, both of the public supporting and being disenchanted with the refugee intake (Gerhards et al. 2016; Czymara/Schmidt-Catran 2017).

A growing tendency towards exclusionary practices against asylum seekers has also been detected in other countries (Hercowitz-Amir/Raijman 2019). The major mechanisms at play are perceptions of threat, social distance (prejudice), and perceiving asylum seekers as ‘bogus’. In Denmark, for example, identifying asylum seekers as a security and socio-economic threat, as persons not in ‘real’ fear of persecution, together with prejudicial attitudes about them, is shown to be strongly associated with exclusionary attitudes towards asylum seekers (Hercowitz-Amir/Raijman 2019).

Host-country residents’ responses to asylum seekers and refugees depend on perceptions of the latter’s ‘deservedness’ and socio-economic potential. A conjoint experiment conducted by Bansak, Hainmueller and Hangartner (2016) examined the perceptions of 18,000 eligible voters in 15 European countries regarding which attributes asylum seekers should possess. The study revealed that asylum seekers who signal higher employability, provide more consistent asylum testimonies and have severe vulnerabilities, and are Christian rather than Muslim, received the greatest public support. These attitudes were independent of age, education level, income, political ideology of the respondents as well as the survey country. By contrast, Cowling, Anderson and Ferguson’s (2019) meta-analysis of 70 studies covering a total of 13,720 individuals found considerable variation across categories of respondents in their attitudes towards refugees. They discovered that being male, religious, nationalist, politically conservative, and less educated is associated with negative attitudes towards refugees. Perceptions of refugees as symbolic and realistic threats are consistently identified as the strongest correlates of negative attitudes (see also Murray/Marx 2013 for the US; Schweitzer et al. 2005 for Australia). Esses et al. (2017) scrutinize the role of national identity in attitudes towards refugees and report an important distinction between nativist/ethnic and civic/cultural beliefs about national identity. Stronger national identity is significantly associated with negative attitudes and behavioural intentions towards asylum seekers (in the form of a willingness to support someone acting against asylum seekers) only among individuals who endorse an ethnic component of national identity (Pehrson/Brown/Zagefka 2009; Pehrson/Green 2010). A cross-national study by Maggini and Fernández (2019) reveals that support for refugees relies on a universalistic con-

ception of solidarity and entails leftist positions on economic issues and libertarian ones on cultural issues. In Australia, right-wing authoritarianists and nationalists were found to be less welcoming towards asylum seekers (Nickerson/Louis 2008).

## 6 Outline of the Special Issue

This Special Issue aims to strengthen the empirical–analytical approach to the study of integration among recent refugee migrants in Germany. It builds on a broader theoretical framework and the empirical evidence gathered in other contexts, as outlined above. The issue includes six studies covering various aspects of refugee migrants' integration into German society. Some compare refugee migrants with other migrants to Germany in terms of their integration potential and differential perceptions of these groups by the rest of the population, while others utilize variation within the group of refugee migrants in terms of their countries of origin, legal status and level of vulnerability. All six papers rely on new rich sources of high-quality data to explore refugee migrants' first steps and the context of the reception they face in Germany. They apply theoretically informed, differentiated and multi-dimensional analyses to provide a wealth of evidence regarding refugees' unique challenges of socio-economic integration as well as more general patterns characteristic of all migrant groups.

In the first paper, 'Has there been a "refugee crisis"? New insights on the recent refugee arrivals in Germany and their integration prospects', Herbert Brücker, Yuliya Kosyakova and Ehsan Vallizadeh provide a detailed description of recent refugee migrants' sociodemographic composition, human capital endowments and selected cultural characteristics—factors that are relevant for any immigrant's labour market integration. They analyse data from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey (Brücker/Rother/Schupp 2017), a unique, nationally representative household survey of refugees who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016. They further discuss Germany's policy responses to the unique challenges of the recent refugee inflow and elaborate on the effectiveness of institutional provisions towards refugee incorporation. They argue that there has *not* been a 'refugee crisis' in Germany. Their evidence suggests that the refugees' demographic composition should not impede their labour market integration, but that skill deficits might. Therefore, considerable investments in refugees' education, vocational training and language acquisition are needed. Extensive efforts to process asylum applications, provide refugees with accommodation and a means of sustenance, as well as integration programs run by the German authorities are starting to pay off. The structural and socio-cultural integration of women remains a considerable challenge, a conclusion that echoes the findings for other countries mentioned above and the results of the study by Kosyakova and Brenzel in this Special Issue.

The second paper, 'Selectivity profiles of recently arrived refugees and labour migrants in Germany', by Christoph Spörlein, Cornelia Kristen, Regine Schmidt

and Jörg Welker, digs deeper into the issue of selectivity among Germany's refugee population by comparing recent refugee migrants to stayers, other migrants arriving in Germany in the same period, as well as refugees resettling in countries that border their countries of origin. The selectivity profiles are evaluated in terms of education level, age and sex distribution—the key observables of labour market success. Relying on the wealth of data, including the IAB-BAMF-GSOEP Refugee Survey, the Arab Barometer, the German Microcensus, and a range of origin-country-specific sources, the paper highlights the gender selectivity among refugee migrants to Germany (i.e., men dominate the refugee inflow), which is considerably more pronounced than among non-humanitarian immigrants. Both refugees and other immigrants are drawn from the younger segments of their origin populations, but relative to their origins, non-humanitarian migrants tend to be younger than refugees. Although refugee migrants are less educated than native-born Germans, they are likely to come from the more educated parts of the educational distributions in their origin countries. Finally, this paper ascertains that, compared to Syrians fleeing to Jordan or Lebanon, Syrian refugees who settle in Germany are more likely to self-select in terms of sex, age and education. This finding suggests that the mechanism behind refugees' selection of destinations is similar to the cost–benefit calculations governing the decisions of economic migrants, leading to both groups' self-selection on key individual labour-market-relevant characteristics.

The third paper, 'The role of trauma for integration: the case of Syrian refugees', by Christian Hunkler and May Khourshed, explores whether (and how) refugees' traumatic experiences shape their prospects of integrating into German society. The authors use specially tailored survey data from the Qualifications, Potentials and Life Courses of Syrian Refugees Study collected shortly after refugees' arrival in Germany in 2014–2015 (Khourshed et al. 2019). The data contain an extensive set of measures related to refugees' structural and cultural integration into Germany and—particularly relevant for the current study—extensive information on experiences of traumatic events before and during migration. Their evidence suggests that Syrian refugees experienced considerable trauma in Syria and on their way to Europe. According to most theoretical accounts, such experiences should be negatively associated with their structural integration into the job market, the education and training system, as well as their German-language acquisition. The findings, however, seem to contradict this assumption. Traumatic experiences are not associated with any significant short-term disadvantages in labour market or educational attainment. Moreover, refugees with more traumatic experiences appear to attain higher German-language levels, which authors attribute to their possibly greater motivation to remain in the new country.

The fourth paper, 'The role of length of asylum procedure and legal status in the labour market integration of refugees in Germany', by Yuliya Kosyakova and Hanna Brenzel, deals with the institutional setting of refugee reception, focusing on the length of the asylum procedure and refugees' legal status. Two outcomes are scruti-

nized: the transition to the first German-language course and the transition to their first job in the host country. The authors analyse data from the second wave of the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey. They use survival analysis techniques to demonstrate that efficient and effective institutional arrangements foster immigrants' incorporation into the host country. Shorter asylum procedures facilitate refugees' investments in learning the host-country language and speed up labour market entry. Refugees who have received a decision on their asylum application are more likely to find a job and take a language course. The type of legal status that is granted seems to play a negligible role: refugee migrants make investments in host-country human capital even if they do not expect to stay in Germany long term. Whether they focus on learning the language or getting a job depends on their origin country: Refugee migrants from countries whose citizens have high prospects of securing legal status are more likely to enrol in language courses, whereas those with poor staying prospects tend to enter the labour market more quickly. The authors speculate that prioritizing labour market integration might eventually improve their prospects of staying in Germany longer.

The fifth paper, 'Education of refugee adolescents at the end of secondary school: the role of educational policies, individual and family resources', by Gisela Will and Christoph Homuth, focuses on the children of refugees, describing the situation of refugee adolescents in the German secondary education system. The study demonstrates the research potential of the ReGES (Refugees in the German Educational System) data collected in five German federal states (Will et al. 2018). The authors establish that on average, refugee adolescents are enrolled in lower grade levels and less prestigious school types than both majority native-born and minority youths. Variation within the refugee population is largely accounted for by students' allocation across the German federal states: federal state policies are a much more powerful predictor of school placement among refugee youth than their previous educational experiences, social background or other individual-level migration-specific aspects. In federal states where new immigrant classes are organized solely into lower or intermediate schools, as for example in Bavaria or Saxony, adolescents are less likely to progress into regular Gymnasia classes. However, there is a relatively weak relationship between federal states and reported grades. Instead, well-established mechanisms of social and ethnic inequality operate among the refugee population, much like other immigrant populations. Among the refugee-specific factors, the authors report a negative correlation between refugees' return orientation and educational achievement and, rather unexpectedly, a positive correlation between residence in collective accommodation and grades. Echoing Hunkler and Khourshed's major conclusion from earlier in the issue, Will and Homuth also fail to find robust significant associations between post-traumatic stress disorder and either educational achievements or school placement among refugee adolescents.

In the last paper of this volume, "Did you read about Berlin?" Terrorist attacks, online media reporting and support for refugees in Germany', Alexander Schmidt-

Catran and Christian Czymara examine German public opinion on immigration in general and the latest wave of refugees in particular. They do it on the example of a single event – a terrorist attack on the Christmas market in Berlin in 2016, which was committed by a person who arrived in the latest refugee wave. The study is based on the German data from the eighth wave of the European Social Survey, the German fieldwork for which coincided with the Berlin attack. This allows for a rigorous analysis of the consequences of the tragic event within a ‘natural experiment’ framework. The results reveal no change in public opinion towards immigrants in general, but a negative shift in attitudes towards refugees after the Berlin attack. The authors use a quantitative content analysis of online media reporting on refugees before and after the attack to identify the mechanisms of the attitude change. Their results reveal that the attack had a significant impact on reporting in the mainstream media, but only for roughly one week after the attack. People started changing their attitudes, however, only weeks later. The authors therefore conclude that public attitudes did not seem to follow the media reporting in this case.

## 7 Key conclusions and avenues for further research

Studies in this Special Issue that focus on the economic and cultural dimensions of refugee integration confirm that refugee pathways into German society have been subjected to similar mechanisms and follow roughly the same trajectories as those of other migrants. Refugee migrants’ human capital and other individual and family resources have been as meaningful for joining the ranks of German labour market as they are for established members of society, including those with and without a migration background. Refugee migrants’ social background has been shown to play a substantial role in their access to education when they arrive in Germany. Gender inequalities have emerged in their access to the labour market or language training, but solely among adult refugees. In the sample of adolescents, no gender disparities have been found, either in access to Gymnasias or with regard to school grades, similar to findings from many other immigrant groups in Germany (Siegert 2008; Siegert/Olszenka 2016; Siegert/Roth 2013). Established members of the receiving society have to yet gain trust in the newcomers, as negative attitudes towards refugees are sparked when the security and identity of German society are threatened, as in the case of terrorist attacks.

Three main findings related to the refugee-specific background conditions outlined above emerge from the studies collected in this Special Issue. First, recent refugee migrants to Germany have been a self-selected group, but their selectivity was not necessarily more negative than among other non-humanitarian migrants who arrived in Germany during approximately the same period; among Syrian refugees, the self-selection was positive compared to refugees who resettled in countries neighbouring Syria. The fact that refugee migrants tend to be young and predominantly male makes them more likely to attempt to directly enter the labour force. Compa-

ratively lower levels of education and a poor command of the German language suggest potential difficulties in entering skill-intensive occupations, unless considerable investments in education and training are made. The state must be prepared to bear the costs of such investments despite the uncertainty of ever being able to reap meaningful returns. Refugees should be kept motivated and avoid being disillusioned by the high opportunity costs, unclear prospects of success, and uncertain benefits of such lengthy and risky investments.

Second, the studies reported here demonstrate that refugee migrants are a vulnerable group, characterized by a high prevalence of post-traumatic disorders, and physical and mental health issues caused by traumatizing events in their country of origin, during their journey to Europe and while awaiting legal certainty in Germany. High levels of traumatization have been reported for both adolescent and adult populations. Yet neither the study on youth (by Will and Homuth) nor the study on adults (by Hunkler and Khourshed) in this Special Issue detected short-term detrimental effects of trauma on refugees' integration into the educational system, language training or labour market. Higher levels of resilience and motivation among refugees might counterbalance the potential negative effects of health impairments due to experiences of war and violence.

Third, the institutional conditions of refugee settlement and incorporation into key host-country institutions have been found to play a substantial role in refugees' first steps in the host country. In this Special Issue, we have shown that on average, lower grade level placement and refugees' allocation to less prestigious school types are primarily related to the patterns of refugee dispersion across the German federal states (the study by Will and Homuth). Young refugee migrants who are settled in federal states that only offer immigrant classes at the lower or intermediate secondary levels are less likely to transition to Gymnasias, irrespective of their individual or family characteristics. Furthermore, our Special Issue shows that prolonged asylum procedures are associated with a lower intake of language courses and postponed labour market entry (the study by Kosyakova and Brenzel). Refugees who receive a prompt decision on their asylum application tend to find a job or take a language course more quickly. The role of refugee migrants' residential arrangements in the structural dimensions of integration (in the education system and the labour market) is the subject of some controversy. Whereas Will and Homuth find a positive correlation between residence in collective accommodation and school grades, Kosyakova and Brenzel report a positive correlation between private residence place and the speed of transition into the first job.

These and other findings reported in the Special Issue were made possible by the availability of high-quality data on recent refugee migrants. Realizing the enormous research potential associated with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees, the German Research Foundation and the German Ministry for Education and Research have invested considerable effort and resources into the data infrastructure



to ensure reliable data on recent refugee migrants. Two of the most prominent datasets—the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey and ReGES—are important to highlight.

The IAB-BAMF-SOEP Refugee Survey is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of individuals who have sought asylum in Germany, irrespective of their current legal status. Thus, it comprises various categories of refugee migrants: asylum seekers, individuals who received asylum according to Article 16a of the German Constitution or have been acknowledged as refugees according to the Geneva Convention, persons who have been granted other forms of protection, and those awaiting deportation because their asylum applications were rejected. The sample frame targeted registered adults who arrived in Germany between January 1, 2013, and January 31, 2016. The first wave covers slightly more than 4,500 adults (aged 18 and over) and almost 5,500 children (aged 17 and below) living in 3,320 households. The survey was administered in person to the respondent and all members of his or her household. The questionnaires were provided in seven languages, ensuring that almost all refugee migrants were interviewed in their mother tongue.

The ReGES is a longitudinal dataset targeting younger refugee migrants in Germany. It covers two age cohorts within the German educational system. The first cohort ( $n = 2,405$ ) comprises children 4 and older who have not yet attended school. These children are followed from preschool age into elementary school. The second cohort ( $n = 2,415$ ) encompasses adolescents aged 14–16 in the first stage of secondary education (before the transition into either the vocational education system or academic upper-secondary education). This sample is comparable to that of the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) (Blossfeld/Roßbach/von Maurice 2011). Unlike the NEPS data, which cover the whole of Germany, the ReGES sample is drawn from five federal states: Bavaria, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saxony. The ReGES targets respondents from countries of origin of recent asylum seekers that have a high protection rate, e.g. Syria.

Both datasets are optimal data sources for studying newly arrived refugee migrants. The data capture refugees almost immediately upon their arrival and follow them for several years, which provides a dynamic perspective on the integration process; in the future it will permit sophisticated analyses of the causes and consequences of various dimensions of integration. The content of the data provides a broad repertoire of topics and aspects, allowing for multidimensional assessments of refugee migrants' integration. Finally, the data contain relevant reference groups or could be easily linked to comparable data for the reference groups (as in the case of the NEPS data) in order to obtain a relative account of refugee integration.

While the very first publications based on these data primarily captured basic descriptive facts and engaged in social reporting to a broader audience, the time and data are ripe to address many more specific and predominantly theoretically driven

questions—an opportunity that we believe this Special Issue has managed to seize. But we are still only at the beginning of the endeavour to understand the long-term patterns and trajectories of refugee integration. The data contain rich information and enormous potential for disentangling precise theoretical mechanisms and conducting in-depth analyses of further research topics. One such theme is refugees' social integration, including their embeddedness in mainstream friendship networks, including online networks, intergroup relations and the role of social media. Another key theme is the cultural–emotional integration of recent refugee migrants, including their identity formation, the development of their religiosity, as well as the shaping of their attitudes and values.

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