

# **Refugee education in Germany: A structural, institutional and individual level of analysis**

## **Exposé**

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Germany has been a migrant-receiving country for more than a century. In recent decades, migrant groups from many different backgrounds have arrived, driven by a range of motives. As the number of young refugees increased starting from 2015, research output on youth and young adults also rose. While the multidimensional character of *arrival* is acknowledged widely, various disciplines investigate different aspects of refugees' experiences upon arrival from macro, meso and micro perspectives. Accordingly, exploring distinct fields such as labour market and education through focusing on place-based conditions, the legal frameworks, and relevant institutions and actors are among common topics of research. Although these strands of research contribute to the literature valuably, overarching investigation considering these interconnected domains synchronically is necessary to unravel the complexity of arrival experiences.

This PhD project approaches migrant arrival from a comprehensive perspective, concentrating on a triangulation of (1) structural, (2) institutional, and (3) individual levels. The main aim is to comprehend the multidimensionality of young refugee's arrival experiences at the local level. Firstly, it is not possible to understand these experiences without analysing the arrival structures, which are, secondly, connected to existing legal frameworks and (migration) history of a place. While legal frameworks either allow inclusion or lead to exclusion of newcomers from various domains of everyday life, local histories help us understand path dependencies and existing support structures. Thirdly, the life-story of a refugee, the specifics of unique biographies and migration trajectories further shape how individuals are selected into specific institutional and structural conditions and how they react to these contextual particularities. Therefore, a comprehensive investigation is essential to understand the experiences of young refugees in arrival contexts.

In terms of arrival experiences, this PhD project narrows the focus to concentrate on the field of education. The field of education is seen as the primary mechanism for promoting the inclusion of newcomers into receiving societies. Integration policies therefore commonly focus on education regulations. For the integration of young migrants, who find themselves in a transition from education to work, these regulations are even more important. Access of young migrants to education is unequal, due to the varying entitlements of distinct legal statuses and inequalities in educational background. Besides, it is not well-understood known how young refugees use education and actively produce educational biographies (or not) in the arriving context. This PhD project thus reconstructs the relations between the institutions, the arrival structures, and refugee youths, to shed light on the possible instrumentalization of education. The goal is to analyse the potentially different education practices of these young refugees upon arrival, who have diverse biographies, distinct migration trajectories, and unequal access to education in Germany. Accordingly, this project will try to answer the question how young

refugees (may) use education actively as a strategy during their arrival experience at the local level.

To answer the question, a spatial and historical approach will be applied to unpack the role of places and path dependencies. Later, the role and perspectives of local stakeholders is explored to understand the structural limitations and the operational power to overcome certain barriers. Importantly, the perspectives of young refugees are studied afterwards through reconstructive methods, to determine how they perceive these limiting structures. Finally, these steps will be triangulated with different biographical experiences and contrasting arrival experiences to understand the meaning and instrumentalization of education. This research takes place in the city of Dortmund, an old industrial area where it's (migration) history provides a rich possibility to exploring arrival experiences of young refugees.