

## "About the Non/Sense of Distinguishing between Migrants and Refugees – a Debate"

The sense and nonsense of the distinction between migrants and refugees was the subject of a virtual panel discussion on 1 October 2020 hosted by the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS) at the University of Osnabrück as part of a workshop on the nexus between forced displacement and migration. Prof Dr Heaven Crawley (Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University), Dr Dana Schmalz (Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg/Berlin) and Prof em. Dr Roger Zetter (Refugee Studies Center, Oxford University), three internationally renowned experts in (forced) migration and refugee studies were invited to discuss their perspectives with the chairs Prof Dr Ulrike Krause and Dr Franck Düvell (both IMIS, FFVT) and over 80 participants from 17 countries worldwide.

The aim of the workshop was to combine perspectives from migration research with forced migration and refugee studies. The virtual panel discussion focused on the question of the academic, normative and political sense and purpose of the different conceptualisations in the field of (forced) migration. The panel highlighted the state of the art of international research and provided a number of important criteria for a critical reflection of the concepts in forced migration and refugee studies.

The panellists pointed out different logics, strategies and resulting tensions between academia, politics and the public in the use of the terms: Behind the supposedly neutral terms are political and normative concepts with a broad spectrum of meanings that have to be part of scientific analyses. The panellists agreed that the categories 'refugee' and 'migrant' should not be essentialised and that their public use should be critically reflected. They also pointed out that the normative purpose of restrictive categories ought to be questioned, as well as the role of academia in public discourse. Rather, the entire spectrum of categories, drivers, motives, routes and multivariate reasons for human mobility, as well as the role of global inequalities should be considered. The participants also acknowledged that the terms and concepts are dominated by the perspectives of the Global North and should thus be supplemented, contrasted and revisited according to interpretations and analyses from other parts of the world. In the ensuing discussion with the audience, the question was discussed, among others, of whether one could expand the existing categories or should break away from existing categories and find new ones. However, it was pointed out that the distinction is useful in concrete contexts, for example, to emphasise and politically defend the specific protection needs of refugees.

The discussion among the panellists (without the audience questions) was recorded and is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwUYVSreHGg>

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## Project Partners

