

Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networking and Knowledge Transfer

Project description (long)

More than 70 million people are currently displaced worldwide—60 per cent of whom stay in their home country (so-called internally displaced people - IDPs), and 40 per cent have fled across state borders. Refugee movements primarily affect countries of the Global South. In 2019, 84 per cent of all registered forcibly displaced persons and 99 per cent of all IDPs were living in Africa, Asia or Latin America. War, repression or the threat by armed groups, but also environmental disasters, climate change as well as poverty and lack of prospects can be identified as conditions for forced displacement. Deterministic notions, however, are out of the question: Even intense violence or a profound change in environmental conditions in a region do not per se lead to increased refugee movements. Rather, numerous economic, social, political and cultural factors must be considered when examining the causes of and background conditions for refugee movements. Very few displaced people have a secure residence status; as a rule, a situation of uncertainty persists. Two-thirds spend years and decades in temporary shelters with limited access to education and legal employment. Forced migration affects people of different social standing in very different ways, both in terms of the causes and the opportunities of movement within their countries of origin or beyond its borders. Women also tend to have less freedom of movement than men and are exposed to other forms of violence.

Forced migration must thus be seen as a process that leads to, at times, pronounced societal changes. "The refugee" as a "border figure of modern times / modernity" not least becomes a challenge for governance structures that are based on the sovereignty of nation states. This is clearly a topic of outstanding academic but also societal and political relevance that requires an interdisciplinary perspective.

Forced migration and refugee studies deal with the background, conditions, forms, infrastructures and consequences as well as the legal dimensions, protection regimes, gaps in protection and political control options of spatial movements induced by violence, conflicts, social conditions and environmental disasters. While forced migration studies have been pursued internationally since the 1980s at the very latest, academia in Germany only began to focus more on global contexts of forced migration as a consequence of the significant increase in the number of refugees in 2014/15. Increasingly, already established fields of research in Germany (such as migration studies, peace and conflict research) developed approaches to a new line of studies on refugees and forced migration



that resulted in remarkable findings within just a few years. However, this field of research is characterised by little exchange and a largely missing institutional foundation (institute, professorships, degree programmes, etc.). This is why refugee and forced migration studies in Germany have not yet been able to fully develop their potential as a field of research.

The cooperation project "Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networks and Transfer" (FFVT) aims to strengthen interdisciplinary research on refugees and forced migration in Germany. To this end, the project, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), brings together research on migration, development, conflict and violence, climate change, health, governance and human rights and other topics. Partners in the FFVT are the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), the Centre for Human Rights Erlangen Nuremberg (CHREN, University of Erlangen Nuremberg), the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS, University of Osnabrück). The overall aim of the project is to link the academic activities in this research field and thus to establish excellent interdisciplinary research on refugees and forced migration with international appeal in Germany. The four institutes that work together in this FFVT-project aim to interlink more closely existing research activities in Germany by cooperating with other German research facilities. The objectives of these networking activities are to a) initiate new collaborative research, b) establish attractive courses of study, c) achieve international visibility and d) promote the dialogue between academia, practitioners, the media and politics. We believe that a sustainable research infrastructure in refugee and forced migration studies can be established in about ten years.

The cooperation project is based on five, closely linked, modules:

\ *Module 1: Networking within the research fields*

To establish an interdisciplinary network of refugee and forced migration research in Germany, taking into account all relevant research fields and actors as well as the promotion of excellent research and innovative reflective thinking is the main task.

\ *Module 2: Teaching and promotion of young researchers*

Since refugee and forced migration studies can not yet be taken on as a field of study at German universities, it is necessary to develop the foundations for (translocal) Master's programmes in refugee and forced migration studies. Furthermore, it is planned to enhance cooperation between different graduate programmes and to establish a research training group. The aim is to create structures that facilitate the education of students and doctoral candidates in coordinated programmes at different locations and that foster the international exchange among junior academics.

\ *Module 3: Internationalisation*

Research conducted in Germany is not adequately linked to international refugee and forced migration studies. The project FFVT will facilitate sustainable networking and increase the visibility of German research in the international academic landscape. To this end, it will initiate cooperation with international researchers, thus establishing sustainable partnerships with strategically relevant institutions in the medium term.

\ *Module 4: Information infrastructure*

An integral element of networking is the establishment of an online portal through which information on researchers, research projects and research outcomes, on transfer activities as well as on methodological and theoretical perspectives can be shared. A database that collects information on projects and researchers also offers the opportunity to analyse specific developments in the research field.

\ *Module 5: Knowledge transfer and dialogue*

Research in refugee and forced migration studies is concerned with matters of outstanding foreign-, domestic and social-political relevance. This is why the dialogue with and the knowledge transfer into politics, practice and the public are of pivotal importance. The project will, among other things, identify the need for dialogue and transfer as well as prepare research findings for policymakers, experts, the media and the public and pass them on to the respective target group.

Networking activities will initiate intensive cooperation between research institutions, researchers and donors, which will result in medium- and long-term institutional structures, firmly established fora and platforms of exchange as well as research alliances. These are the prerequisites for a sustainable establishment of refugee and forced migration studies in Germany.

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