

Refugees' inclusion at work: A comparative analysis of facilitators and barriers in Germany and The Netherlands

The global community is currently witnessing the historically highest number of people fleeing war and persecution (UNHCR, 2018). For many of these refugees, Europe is the final destination, which makes the integration of several million people from various backgrounds a crucial task for the European Union (Betts/Collier, 2015; Eurostat, 2017; The Economist, 2015). Finding relevant work has been shown to be of particular importance for the integration of refugees, given that it directly affects their financial independence (e.g., de Vroome/van Tubergen, 2010), well-being and health (e.g., Ager/Strang, 2008), acculturation (e.g., García-Ramírez et al., 2011), and their acceptance among the receiving societies (e.g., Markaki/Longhi, 2013). Yet, we also know that refugees hold a disadvantaged labor market position that keeps them in occupations with a lower status than their actual profession, or out of jobs altogether (e.g., Ager/Strang, 2008; Baranik et al., 2017; Cheung/Phillimore, 2014; Hooijer/Picot, 2015). With the term refugees, we refer to humanitarian migrants including refugees as defined by the Geneva Refugee Convention, people with subsidiary protection status or other protection status because they are particularly vulnerable and face additional barriers to enter the labor market (e.g. traumatic experience, no availability of documents to prove education level) as opposed to other migrant groups (e.g. labor migrants) (OECD, 2016).

Most explanations for the limited access of refugees to work in host societies focus on the individual level (experiences of refugees) by applying social and human capital theory (e.g., de Vroome/van Tubergen, 2010; Hartog/Zorlu, 2009), or on the contextual level, focusing on country-specific policies and programs (e.g., Bleijenbergh et al., 2014). In contrast, the organizational level and the interactions among the three levels, which diversity research has shown to affect minority group members' inclusion at work (Syed/Ozbilgin, 2009; Syed/Pio, 2010), are rarely taken into account. Furthermore, we lack country-specific perspectives on diversity management in general (Farndale et al., 2015; Nishii/Özbilgin, 2007) and, especially country-comparative investigations (Klarsfeld et al., 2016) as well as studies on the specific group of refugees and their access to and inclusion at work (e.g., Knappert et al., 2017; Pedersen, 2012). Hence, the goal of this study is to explore facilitators and barriers of refugees' inclusion on the individual, organizational and national level, investigate how the levels interrelate and differ between Germany and The Netherlands.

In answering these research questions, we build on the definition of inclusion by Shore et al. (2011, p. 1265) who describe it as "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness". Following this conceptualization, inclusion is considered an individual experience that plays an important role for individual outcomes such as individual careers, well-being, and performance. Prior research has shown that various factors at the individual level, including language proficiency, work experience, gender, and contact with natives, affect access to and inclusion at work (e.g., de Vroome/van Tubergen, 2010; Knappert et al., 2017). However, based on Syed and Özbilgin's (2009) relational framework of diversity management, we

argue that an understanding of refugees' perceptions of inclusion at work needs an examination of influences not only at the individual level, but also at the organizational and the contextual level, as well as of interactions among these three levels. Regarding methods, we apply a qualitative research design to explore this under-studied terrain and currently conduct and analyze semi-structured interviews with refugees, employers, and experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations in Germany and The Netherlands.

Refugees' inclusion in Dutch and German workplaces

Data on employment opportunities of refugees in European countries are still scarce. However, we know that Germany (in absolute terms) – together with Sweden and Austria (relative to their population) – is one of the major destination countries for refugees in Europe (European Parliament, 2016). According to the perception of refugees who requested asylum in Germany between 2013 and 2016 this is because human rights are respected, the educational system is good, its culture is welcoming and labor market conditions are promising (Brücker et al., 2016). In Germany, 441.899 people applied for asylum for the first time ("Asylerstantrag") in 2015, 722.370 in 2016 and 198.317 in 2017 (BAMF, 2018). Out of all asylum applications in 2016, 36,9% were by people from Syria, followed by Afghanistan (17,6%), Iraq (13,3%) and Iran (3,7%) (BAMF, 2017). Compared to other EU countries, recognition rates are quite high in Germany: Out of all decisions made on asylum applications in 2016 (631.180 in total), 40,6% of applicants were recognized as refugee (according to Geneva Refugee Convention), 24,4% were granted subsidiary protection and 3,8% humanitarian protection (BAMF, 2017). According to estimations by the IMF, those European countries who receive most refugees like Sweden or Germany also have the highest spending on refugees. Germany spends 0,4% of GDP as opposed to The Netherlands which hosts less refugees and spends only 0,23% of GDP on refugees' support (IMF, 2016).

Although The Netherlands has a history of being a popular destination for refugees, in the last decade it has become somewhat less welcoming (MIPEX, 2018). The financial crisis, increased unemployment, and more conservative governments have caused The Netherlands to be much more reserved towards refugees compared to Germany. In 2015, 43.093 refugees requested asylum in The Netherlands (of which 70% was granted asylum by the end of 2016), among whom 43% Syrians. In 2016, these numbers lowered to 18.171 asylum request, of which 12% by Syrians, followed by Albania (9%) Eritrea (8%) and Morocco (7%) (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2017). Similar to Germany, recognition rates are high in The Netherlands compared to other EU countries: Out of all decisions made on asylum applications in 2016 (28.875 in total), 33,7% of applicants were recognized as refugee, 37,4% were granted subsidiary protection and 1,3% humanitarian protection (BAMF, 2017).

Refugees who request asylum in The Netherlands are first obliged to stay in a reception center. Their stay in such a center can last for months or even years, during which they remain in relative isolation from the native Dutch population and in the first six months are not allowed to engage in paid work. After these six months, if they are still in the asylum request procedure, paid work is only allowed under specific circumstances (e.g., the employer must provide a permit,

asylum seekers can only keep 25% of their income to a maximum of €185).

The procedure in Germany is similar: Once having entered German territory, refugees need to register and are distributed into reception centers in different German Federal States from where they officially apply for asylum. Asylum applicants are granted a permission to reside (“Aufenthaltsgestattung”) until a decision has been made on their legal status. Persons whose asylum request has been rejected, but whose deportation has been suspended (e.g. due to humanitarian reasons) are referred to as “Geduldete”. Having stayed in Germany for at least three months and given that they live no longer in a reception center, people with permission to reside or temporary suspension of deportation can be authorized to take up employment by the immigration authority and local employment agency under certain conditions (e.g. given that no “priority employees” like German citizens are available for the vacancy). Those granted asylum or refugee protection receive a temporary residence permit for three years. People with subsidiary protection receive a temporary residence permit for one year. In all cases permits can be extended or transformed into a permanent residence permit and access to the labor market is possible without restrictions (BAMF, 2018).

When refugees are granted asylum in The Netherlands, they are obliged to follow an integration course (which takes about 600 hours) that they need to pass within three years. The majority of this integration course focuses on learning the Dutch language and culture, but there is also a part that is aimed at preparing the refugees for the Dutch labor market. This is an important component, because paid work is known to facilitate integration (Ager/Strang, 2008; de Vroome/van Tubergen, 2010; Markaki/Longhi, 2013). However, in The Netherlands even ten years after being granted asylum, only one-third of refugees between 18-64 years old has paid work for more than 30 hours a week (Engbersen, 2015). In Germany, analyses have also shown that the labor market integration of refugees is a slow and difficult process, though outcomes seem to be more promising with 62% of refugees being employed ten years after arrival (European Parliament, 2016). With the new German Integration law that went into force in summer 2016, the state seeks to improve the situation and offer better integration perspectives, e.g. by providing more language courses or by allowing so-called “Geduldete” to stay in Germany for the period of their apprenticeship and subsequent work contract. On the other hand, this law also sanctions refugees who, for instance, negate to participate in integration courses (Die Bundesregierung, 2017).

Lately, there is a downward trend in both countries regarding the numbers of people seeking refuge due to the EU-Turkey agreement from March 2016 in which Turkey agreed to prevent refugees from coming to Europe in exchange for financial compensation (The Economist, 2016). Yet, the labor market integration of refugees continues to be a lengthy and challenging process and it thus will remain a pertinent question in the long-run how workplace inclusion of refugees can be improved and accelerated in Germany and The Netherlands.

We selected these two countries because the general case characteristics are comparable (Miles & Huberman, 1996), e.g. both are industrial nations and EU-member states with democratic political systems and thus, findings from one country might be applicable to the other. A comparative

analysis of their approaches of dealing with workplace inclusion of refugees allows us to contrast respective legislations, institutional varieties and consequences for individuals and may therefore provide highly relevant insights for theory and practice (Klarsfeld et al., 2016).

Methods

In order to find answers to our research questions, we currently collect and analyze qualitative interview data. To be able to explore the three interrelated levels, the selection of interview partners involves individuals (i.e., the refugees themselves), the organizational level (i.e., employers and an employment agency), and the contextual level (i.e., governmental and NGO representatives). In both countries, data collection is still ongoing. To date, in The Netherlands semi-structured interviews with eight refugees, four employers, and six experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations have been conducted. In Germany, semi-structured interviews with six refugees and eight experts have been realized.

The interviews were conducted face to face, and lasted up to 120 minutes. Depending on the preference of the respondent, interviews were conducted in German, Dutch or English, were transcribed verbatim, and Dutch transcripts were translated to English to ensure that all members of the research team could understand and analyze them (Zikic et al., 2010). Two parallel semi-structured interview guidelines were used (one specified for refugees and the other for employers and experts) that covered questions regarding the respondents' personal background, diversity and inclusion practices in the current organization, the role of HR, and refugees and the German or Dutch context.

Using a software for qualitative analyses, data are coded and analyzed guided by theoretical concepts (i.e., we coded barriers and facilitators on the individual, organizational, and contextual level), while the contents to this structure were derived from the interviews (Gläser/Laudel, 2013).

Preliminary results

So far, we found several elements to be critical for refugees' inclusion. For example, in both countries social capital was described as extremely helpful for refugees' inclusion, especially contact to locals who acted as social bridges to potential employers and therewith enhanced chances of finding a job. Other elements described as facilitators were e.g., media attention, supervisors' commitment to integration, or refugees' high motivation/ambition to integrate. Themes perceived as barriers to refugees' inclusion were e.g., constant relocation or stereotyping, in particular derogatory comments made by colleagues related to refugees' origin or religion.

In a next step, a more in-depth cross-case analysis of differences and similarities between Germany and The Netherlands will be carried out as well as analyses on the interplay between the individual, organizational and contextual level elements. For instance, we could already identify certain facilitating dynamics (e.g., media attention leads to more societal awareness and more organizational CSR programs), as well as interplays with negative consequences for refugees' inclusion (e.g., slow administrative processes deteriorate refugees' motivation).

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