

Organisational support for refugee students in German higher education

A systems theoretical analysis of the formalisation and development of support structures for refugee students and underlying discourses at German higher education organisations

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Zusammenfassung

Für Geflüchtete kann (höhere) Bildung ein Mittel sein, Anschluss und Teilhabe in einem neuen Land aufzubauen. In Reaktion auf stark gestiegene Asylantragszahlen und der Ambition vieler Geflüchteter, in Deutschland ein Studium zu beginnen oder wieder aufzunehmen, wurden 2016 eine Reihe öffentlicher Förderprogramme eingerichtet, die Hochschulen ermöglichen sollten, Studienbewerber*innen mit Fluchterfahrung gezielt zu unterstützen. Parallel entstanden an vielen deutschen Hochschulen durch das Engagement von Mitarbeiter*innen und Studierenden eine Reihe dezentraler Unterstützungsangebote, die mit Hilfe der neu verfügbaren Mittel formalisiert werden konnten.

Die kumulative Dissertation basiert auf Expert*inneninterviews mit Hochschulmitarbeiter*innen, die als Ansprechpartner*innen für studieninteressierte Geflüchtete und in Leitungsfunktionen bezüglich der Internationalisierung der Hochschulen beschäftigt sind, und untersucht Unterstützungsangebote für Geflüchtete an deutschen Hochschulen. Damit trägt sie zu einem aktuellen und schnell wachsenden Forschungsfeld bei. Sie umfasst sechs Aufsätze, die sich mit dem Forschungsstand zum Studium für Geflüchtete, den Herausforderungen und Angeboten für Studieninteressierte und Studierende mit Fluchterfahrung, der Formalisierung der Angebote für Geflüchtete, den Erwartungen an und Erfahrungen mit der Ausgestaltung der Angebote, und mit zugrundeliegende organisationalen Diskursen auseinandersetzen. Zudem wird eine Übersicht über die Entwicklung der Förderprogramme von ihrer Initiierung über die Formalisierung und weitere Entwicklung im Kontext praktischer Erfahrungen und veränderter Förderbedingungen gegeben. Die Förderung von Studierenden mit Fluchterfahrung wird dabei im Kontext der Internationalisierung, sowie gesellschaftlicher Verantwortung deutscher Hochschulen diskutiert.

An allen untersuchten Hochschulen wurden in Folge dezentraler, teilweise ehrenamtlicher, Einzelangebote mit Hilfe externer Finanzierung Unterstützungsprogramme für Geflüchtete etabliert. Dabei wurde jeweils mindestens eine Teilzeit-Stelle geschaffen, die als Ansprechpartner*in für Geflüchtete fungiert, verschiedene Unterstützungsangebote koordiniert und einen zentralen Knotenpunkt inner- und außerorganisationaler Kommunikationsstrukturen bezüglich geflüchteter Studierender darstellt. Diese Stellen können als strukturelle Formalisierung organisationaler Verantwortung verstanden werden. Darüber hinaus adressierten die Angebote für Geflüchtete die akademische und soziale Integration. Ein zentrales Anliegen war es dabei, die angehenden Studierenden bei der Erfüllung formaler Kriterien zu unterstützen. Weitere Aspekte, die den Alltag Asylsuchender und Geflüchteter in Deutschland prägen und den Studienzugang und –erfolg beeinflussen können, wie etwa die Unterbringung oder finanzielle Sicherheit, wurden dabei kaum adressiert; vielmehr wurden etablierte Strategien der Studienvorbereitung pfadabhängig angepasst und erweitert. Einige der Angebote mussten nach ersten Praxiserfahrungen angepasst werden, da sie initial in der Regel auf Vorannahmen von Hochschulmitarbeiter*innen bezüglich der Bedarfe Geflüchteter basierten. Das zeigt, wie wichtig die Passung von Angeboten mit den Lebensumständen und Bedarfen der Zielgruppe ist und eröffnet die Frage nach dem Einfluss der Zielgruppe auf die Gestaltung der Angebote.

Im Kontext der Etablierung spezifischer Angebote wurde die formale Unterscheidung zwischen Studienbewerber*innen mit und ohne Fluchterfahrung eingeführt, die von der Ausbildung eines organisationalen Diskurses über Studienbewerber*innen und Studierende mit Fluchterfahrung

begleitet wurde. Da dieser zunächst hauptsächlich die Funktion hatte, Förderanlässe zu identifizieren, war er von starker Defizitorientierung geprägt. Eine weitere zentrale Funktion dieses Diskurses war die Rechtfertigung des hohen Förderaufwandes für eine vergleichsweise kleine Gruppe. In den Interviews wurde die Unterstützung Geflüchteter immer wieder in den Kontext bestehender Strategien, etwa zur Internationalisierung, Diversifizierung oder der Übernahme sozialer Verantwortung, gesetzt. Dass solche Strategien hier auf neue Förderziele angewandt werden, verweist auf die grundlegende Bedeutung allgemeiner Dokumente organisationaler Selbstbeschreibung und Zielsetzung.

Basierend auf dem Bestreben, Studierende mit Fluchterfahrung nicht dauerhaft zu isolieren, und im Kontext geänderter Förderbedingungen zeichnete sich in den letzten Interviews ab, dass die Differenzierung zwischen geflüchteten und internationalen Studierenden abgeschwächt wird. Was die Angebotsgestaltung angeht, zeichnete sich ab, dass die Unterscheidung im chronologischen Verlauf von Studienbewerbung bis Arbeitsmarktzugang zunehmend an Bedeutung verlieren soll: Während sich die Maßnahmen der Studienvorbereitung weiterhin gezielt an Geflüchtete wenden sollen, soll die Studienbegleitung und Förderung des Arbeitsmarktzuganges Geflüchtete nicht direkt adressieren, sondern sich allgemein an internationale Studierende richten.

Die kurzfristige und befristete Etablierung pfadabhängiger Angebote, die mit der gleichzeitigen Ausprägung eines organisationalen Diskurses über geflüchtete Studierende einherging, kann als Beispiel für den Umgang von Hochschulen mit aktuellen Entwicklungen betrachtet werden. Dabei zeigte sich an den untersuchten Hochschulen, dass (zeitlich befristete) strukturelle Anpassungen nicht in die Kernstrukturen der betreffenden organisationalen Einheiten eingreifen, sondern, entsprechend der theoretischen Vorannahme, prinzipiell der Aufrechterhaltung dieser dienen. Des Weiteren zeigt die Analyse den engen Zusammenhang zwischen diskursiven Repräsentationen und strukturellen Entwicklungen.

Während Geflüchtete formal als internationale Studierende kategorisiert werden, zeigt sich

Schließlich ergeben sich aus den Analysen Anchlüsse für die weitere Forschung hinsichtlich der Weiterentwicklung der Angebote im Kontext veränderter gesellschaftlicher und Förderbedingungen, der Passung von Bedarfen und Angeboten, des Zusammenhangs zwischen Förderangeboten und Studienerfolg, und schließlich dazu, ob und inwiefern die Erfahrungen mit geflüchteten Studienbewerber*innen und Studierenden organisationalen Wandel anregen und in die Gestaltung weiterer Angebote einfließen werden.

Schlagwörter: Studium für Geflüchtete, Studienzugang, Organisationale Diskurse, Organisationale Responsivität

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Summary

Since the refugee influx in 2015 and 2016, many German higher education organisations (HEOs) have implemented support programmes for refugee students in order to enable them to pursue their academic goals. Public funding schemes were established quickly to facilitate those efforts. Based on those funding opportunities, decentral support offers and activities of volunteers were formalised into coordinated support structures for refugee students. Based on a systems theoretical framework, I have analysed expert-interviews with first contacts for refugee students and heads of international offices that were conducted between 2017 and 2020. Throughout six papers, I investigate the initiation, formalisation and adaptation of support structures for refugee students at German HEOs.

The quick, but also temporary, establishment of support projects can be seen as an example of organisational responsiveness and responsibility in view of recent events. All sampled HEOs created a first contact position to counsel refugee students and coordinate the various additional support measures. They can be seen as boundary-positions, mediating between organisations' communicative expectations and refugee students' expectations, needs and situations. Further, they are a key point of the communicative network regarding refugee students, maintaining internal and external cooperations and collecting relevant information on refugee students' situations, aspirations, as well as social, legal and organisational contexts. Additional offers address formal access criteria, as well as academic and social inclusion of refugee students. The specific offers at each sampled HEOs were generally path-dependently based on existing offers. Further, the systemic boundaries defined the range of programmes: Refugees were addressed in established ways of student support, with a main focus on enabling them to meet formal criteria for enrolment. Other aspects of their situation, such as housing or finances, were perceived as outside HEOs responsibilities, regardless of their potential influence on student success. It should also be noted that offers were usually based on ascribed needs and partly had to be adjusted based on experiences with and feedback from refugee students.

Along with specific support structures for refugees, a formal differentiation between international students with and without the experience of forced migration was established. Addressing refugee students as a new target group lead to a specific, often deficit-oriented, organisational discourse on refugee students. Because little academic or practical knowledge on higher education for refugees was available, support structures for refugee students were initially often based on ascribed needs and presumed benefits. They were mostly differentiated from other international students based on the specific needs arising from their circumstances of migration. In addition to identifying needs and potential ways to support refugee students, another function of this discourse was to justify the support for a comparatively small group of students. This was done by connecting them to existing mission statements in the context of higher education organisations' internationalisation, diversification and social responsibility and describing refugee students as a highly motivated new group of students. The connection of refugee students to existing mission statements shows the importance of such documents: by providing a framework of generalised objectives, they allow flexible support for new target groups.

Recently, funding conditions for the continuation of support after 2020 have changed. In addition to study preparation courses, student support and programmes to support labour market transitions were to be established. Those new offers are supposed to be open for all

(international) students. Along with this development, the interview analysis shows a gradual attenuation of the differentiation between international and refugee students. A chronological shift from refugee applicants to international students and graduates seems to replace the focus on students' legal status during previous project phases.

The structural adaptations and changes do not seem to foster organisational change, but rather reinforce the key functions and structures of higher education organisations and their sub-units. At the sampled HEOs, all activities concerning refugee students depend on funding and it has yet to be determined whether the experience with refugee students will inspire lasting adaptations of organisational structures. Overall, the analysis shows the close connection between function, organisational discourse and structural development.

Further research should look into further development of offers for refugee students in the context of changing social and funding conditions and investigate, whether and how experiences with refugee students are recorded and potentially used beyond the current situation and this specific target group. Also, further research should analyse to what extent existing offers are meeting the actual needs of refugee students and whether and how they enable and influence refugees' student success.

Keywords: refugee students; organisational discourses; organisational responsiveness

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List of abbreviations

ALG II	Unemployment Benefit II
AsylbLG	Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz
BAMF	German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
BAföG	Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz
BMBF	German Federal Ministry of Education and Research
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative
DZHW	German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies
EU	European Union
FH	University of Applied Sciences
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEO	Higher Education Organisation
IAB	Institute for Employment Research
WeGe	Research project Refugees' pathways into German higher education
U	University
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1 Overview of cumulative dissertation

In 2019, 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, including 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2019a). Only 3% of refugees have access to tertiary education (UNHCR, 2019b). Because many of them are living in poverty or without secure coverage of their basic needs, refugees' access to higher education has long received little attention (Dryden-Peterson, 2019). However, in order “to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies” (UNESCO, n.y.), the importance of providing lifelong education for everyone, including refugees, has been repeatedly emphasised in recent years and the topic has elicited increased social and academic interest. Higher education not only offers a chance to optimise access to the labour market in a new country but is also understood as a source of hope, as a basis for building a new life, and as the chance to overcome and defy stereotypes (Grüttner, Schröder, Berg & Otto, 2018; Ramos, 2020). The United Nations aims to “[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2019) by 2030 in their fourth sustainable development goal. This includes the creation of safe learning environments for refugees (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women & UNHCR, 2015). By 2013, the UNHCR aims to ensure access for 15% of refugees (UNHCR, 2019b; 2019c). In order to realise those goals, politics and higher education organisations (HEOs) need to cooperate in creating safe and inclusive learning spaces.

In Germany, the topic was perceived as increasingly important after the refugee influx around 2015: Many of the newly arriving asylum seekers and refugees wished to continue or begin their higher education in Germany, and about one third of them had credentials that were likely to be acknowledged as university entrance certificates (Brücker, Rother & Schupp, 2016). In a context of discourses of social responsibility and refugees as potential new professionals for the labour market (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018), new funding opportunities for support-projects emerged. At the same time, many German HEOs initiated offers for refugee students in order to support their access to and success in higher education.

Simultaneously, the topic received increased worldwide academic attention, creating a rapidly growing research field that touches a broad variety of interdisciplinary topics, such as equity and inclusion, internationalisation, preparation for, access to and

success in higher education, social integration, and participation. Most publications focus on challenges for refugee students or evaluate individual support programmes. However, even though different approaches and their effects on refugee students have been broadly discussed, analysis of the initiation and development of offers for refugee students based on organisational theory has been sparse. In order to contribute to this quickly emerging and dynamic research field, I aim to provide insights to organisational aspects of support for refugee students. Based on a qualitative research design, I have investigated the initiation, formalisation and further development of offers for refugee students at German HEOs and emerging organisational discourses on refugee students. While international literature and research, including the ongoing WeGe-project,¹ provide insights to the perspectives of refugee students, this dissertation focusses on the perspectives of HEO members as crucial actors in initiating, implementing, formalising and enacting offers for refugee students.

Investigating organisational reactions to this specific target group provides an example for how HEOs navigate challenges and opportunities, such as the sudden availability of funding, and thus shows their responsiveness to social challenges and how they take on social responsibility. Further, it sheds light on one of the many institutional conditions that refugees must manoeuvre while settling in a new country.

1.1 Paper overview

This section provides a brief overview of the six papers that are included in this cumulative dissertation. They are attached and summarised in more detail below.

During recent years, research on higher education for refugees has greatly increased. **Paper 1** is part of the literature discussion; it specifically focusses on recent topics and dynamics of this newly emerging research field by reviewing papers published between 2016 and 2019. As I am presenting international literature, I am not using the term ‘higher education organisations’, but ‘higher education institutions’, the term most frequently used in the discussed papers.

Because little was known about higher education for refugees and only few studies had started exploring the situation in Germany when I began work on this dissertation, the study design included an explorative pre-study that mainly focussed on investigating what German HEO members perceived as central challenges for refugees in German higher education and what support was offered at German HEOs. **Paper 2 (Berg, 2018)** gives an

¹ <https://www.wege.dzhw.eu/>

overview of those early insights and considerations. I used this pre-study to choose a theoretical framework. During the explorative study, I used the term ‘higher education institutions’ rather than ‘HEOs’, mainly because it seemed to be the most direct translation of the German term ‘*Hochschulen*’, which generally includes universities and universities of applied sciences. However, as my further analysis focussed on HEOs as organisations, I then started to refer to them as ‘HEOs’ throughout all other papers.

The findings of the main study and thus the central results of my research are presented and discussed in three papers: Anja Gottburgsen, Bernd Kleimann and I have analysed the formalisation of support programmes for refugee students. **Paper 3 (Berg, Gottburgsen & Kleimann, 2021)** discusses internal and external factors that led to the initiation and formalisation of support structures and specifically focusses on the first contact positions that were established to counsel refugees and often also to coordinate the support.

Further, I have focussed on how refugee students are represented in organisational semantics and how they are positioned within HEOs. The main focus of **paper 4 (Berg, 2021a)** is how the interviewees argued for the importance of supporting refugee students and how they framed this new target group within the context of their organisation, especially in the context of the internationalisation and diversification of higher education. Additionally, it shows how the programmes, which were often based on assumptions about the newly established target group, had to be adjusted according to experiences with refugee students. The paper is based on interviews conducted in 2017 and 2018 with first contacts and heads of international offices. For **paper 5 (Berg, 2022)**, additional follow-up interviews with 7 first contacts for refugees from late 2019 and early 2020 were included in the analysis. The interviews showed that those support programmes that had applied for further funding often aimed to integrate offers for refugee students with those for all international students, and differentiations between those two groups that had previously been emphasised in order to warrant additional support for refugee students had grown blurrier. In the context of changed federal calls for funding applications, I have looked into the interplay of programme development and changing organisational discourses on refugee students in contrast or comparison to international students.

Finally, **paper 6 (Berg, 2021b)** is a part of the discussion, but also includes a new take on the empirical evidence. It is based on all interviews from the main study and provides an overview of the different phases of initiation and further development of support programmes for refugee students at German HEOs. While previous papers

focussed on organisational perspectives on refugees in contrast and comparison to international students, this chapter discusses support for refugee students as part of HEOs' third mission. Further, it highlights practical implications that can be derived from the empirical results of this study.

1.2 A word on affiliation and institutional context: The WeGe research project

In May 2017, I started a doctoral position within the research project 'WeGe – Pathways of refugees into German higher education'. The WeGe-project investigates refugee students' trajectories into higher education with a focus on formal study preparation. It is based on a Mixed-Methods-Design, including an exploratory qualitative pre-study followed by parallel quantitative and qualitative surveys of refugees and international students in study preparation courses at higher education institutions and preparatory colleges ('*Studienkollegs*') at six locations in Germany. The main research interests are individual, institutional and structural factors influencing the trajectories and success of study preparations and educational transitions. While the main focus lies on the perspective of refugee students, the exploratory pre-study included a number of expert-interviews in a case study of one of the project's research locations. Additional expert-interviews with teachers and counsellors were conducted in late 2019 in order to provide further contextual information and address questions that came up during the analysis of previous project-data.

During the conceptualisation of my thesis, it quickly became apparent that I would need different data than the WeGe-project in order to answer my research questions. Even though the larger topic, 'higher education for refugees', is similar, the WeGe-project and my dissertation deal with fundamentally different research questions: they not only focus on different perspectives, but the main focus of the WeGe-project is transition-research, while I am looking into organisational responses to a new target group.

The qualitative pre-study for this thesis was scheduled parallel to the WeGe-project's pre-study. Based on my research questions, I focussed on the perspectives of HEO members, mainly international office members, while the WeGe study mainly focusses on the perspective of refugee students and additional experts, mostly teachers and counsellors. Of the five HEOs I sampled for my pre-study, three are also part of the WeGe-sample. Two of them were further included in my main study. At one HEO, expert-interviews were conducted within the WeGe-project in 2017, including an interview with the first contact for refugees. I conducted the interview and included it in my pre- and main study. Within

the project, we developed individual interview guidelines for each profession. Thus, I was able to include my research interests in the first contact interview guidelines and upon these then based the development of the interview guidelines for my exploratory pre-study. Other than using this interview, the conceptualisation, sampling, data collection and analysis for this doctoral thesis were not related to the WeGe-project. However, working on those different aspects of higher education for refugees has brought me deeper insights and into increased contact with different actors and perspectives within the field. Also, the affiliation with the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies made some practitioners more interested in participating in my research. Last but not least, the WeGe-project provided a productive and friendly working environment.

1.3 Refugees in German higher education

During the years 2015 and 2016, the number of asylum applications peaked in Europe and Germany, exceeding any year since World War II (BAMF, 2020). The often high educational aspirations of the newly arriving asylum seekers (Brücker et al., 2016) were met by a rising political interest in educating refugees and integrating them into the German labour market (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018). The German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) quickly started federal funding schemes in order to support the integration of refugees into German higher education. There are two federal funding schemes: The Integra project was funded with 100 million Euros between 2016 and 2019 and mainly focussed on language classes and academic preparation courses, while the Welcome project was established to support student engagement for refugees, e.g. by providing funding for paid student positions. Welcome projects often focus on social integration or are used to support voluntary projects like refugee law clinics that were started by law students at many German HEOs and focus on legal counselling for refugee students. Further state-level funding schemes became available in some German states (*'Bundesländer'*). They are often granted for shorter periods, e.g. for one year. Generally, they support similar projects as federal funding schemes, and partly also additional measures like scholarships for refugee students.

Until that time, hardly any German higher education organisation (HEO) had directly addressed or supported refugee students (Schammann & Younso, 2016). Generally, they treated refugees and asylum seekers as international students and did not register their residence status. Refugees could apply, enrol and study based on the same formal criteria as international students. The regular admission process includes an

application with all necessary credentials, such as a university entrance certificate and certificates of the necessary language proficiency. Under specific circumstances, students that have successfully applied for asylum can have access to public financial support, namely interest-free public student loans (*'BAföG'*). They are also usually freed from tuition fees for international students. The formal classification of refugee students as international students in combination with additional access to domestic student support creates a unique situation for refugee students (Schneider, 2018).

Based on voluntary engagement and the newly available funding schemes, many German HEOs quickly established support for refugee students in and after 2015 (Berg et al., 2021.; Schammann & Younso, 2016; Schröder et al., 2019), making Germany one of the countries with the most advanced support for refugee students (UNESCO, 2018). The offers were well received: Over 14,000 refugees participated in Integra courses in 2016 and 2017 (Fourier, Kracht Araújo, Latsch, Siemens, Schmitz & Grüttner, 2018). While most study preparation courses are closely monitored, no data on residence status is collected once refugees successfully apply at German HEOs. Therefore, no information was or is available about the number of former or current refugee students. Though it is likely that refugees studied at German HEOs before 2015, there was little academic and practical knowledge about their specific situation and ways to support them. Since then, an increasing number of academic studies have looked into the situation of refugee students. National and institutional guidelines for the support of refugee students became available and there is growing practical experience and expertise. One of the central topics of this thesis is how offers for refugee students were initiated, formalised and further developed.

Initially, federal funding was limited until late 2019. When data collection for this dissertation was completed, the applications for the continuation of Integra and Welcome after 2019 were yet to be decided on. The amount of further funding was not yet publicly known. The focus in the call for applications had changed towards supporting access to the labour market and integrating offers for refugee students with those for all international students, which caused some HEOs to plan to restructure their support for refugee students in the case of further funding (Berg, 2021b).

1.4 Research on higher education for refugees

When I began this project in 2017, research on higher education for refugees was sparse. Most studies had focussed on primary and secondary education (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). The few international publications mostly focussed on challenges for refugees in entering

and obtaining higher education and were usually based on qualitative case studies (Berg, Grüttner, & Schröder, 2018; Ramsay & Baker, 2019). Mainly, international literature addressed cases in the U.K. (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, Silvani, 2019; Morrice, 2009; 2013), the USA (Hirano, 2011, 2014) and Australia (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012; Harris, Chi, Spark Ceridwen, 2013; Harris, Spark & Watts, 2015; Naidoo, 2015). Only individual papers dealt with the situation in Germany. In comparison to international literature, they rather focussed on the responses of higher education institutions to the then recent refugee influx and provided quantitative (Beigang, von Blumenthal & Lambert, 2018) as well as qualitative (Iwers-Stelljes, Bosse & Heudorfer, 2016; Schammann & Younso, 2016) overviews of early responses at German HEOs. They found a high interest in supporting refugee students, but also a lack of orientation and initial insecurities in dealing with this new target group.

Although most German HEOs did not offer specific support for refugees before 2015, the growing number of asylum applications, the high interest of many newly arriving refugees in higher education and the sudden availability of funding led to a quick development of extensive support programmes for refugees at German HEOs. Since then, along with public interest, the number of academic publications has increased rapidly. **The first paper of this dissertation provides a comprehensive overview of recent literature on higher education for refugees.**

The impact of the war in Syria and growing numbers of people seeking asylum in neighbouring countries and Europe are reflected in policy reactions and also in the regional focus of academic research on tertiary refugee education: Based on its structural funding and support of the topic, Germany has become one of the most noted (UNESCO, 2018) and is among the most researched countries in this quickly growing research field, along with Canada (Bajwa, Abai, Couto, Kidd, Dibavar & McKenzie, 2019; Villegas & Aberman, 2019) and Australia (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Dunwoodie, Kaukko, Wilkinson, Reimer & Webb, 2020; Lenette, Baker & Hirsch, 2019; White, 2017). Further, support programmes in Turkey (Atesok, Komsuoglu & Ozer, 2019; Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2018) and Jordan (AbduRazak, Mawdieh, Karam, Yousef Aljaafreh & Al-Azzaw, 2019; Al-Rousan, Fredricks, Chaudhury, Albezreh, Alhokair & Nelsen, 2018; Crea & Sparnon, 2017) have been receiving increased attention.

The majority of international studies on higher education for refugees focus on the situation and experiences of refugee students and their challenges in entering and obtaining higher education. Some of the challenges are similar to those that other international

students with no experience of forced migration face. Others are more specific to the situation of students who were forced to flee to the receiving country (Berg, 2018; Berg et al., 2018). Among typical challenges for refugee students are language proficiency (Shakya, Guruge, Hynie, Akbari, Malik, Htoo, Khogali, Mona, Murtaza & Alley, 2010; Stevenson & Willott, 2007), disrupted educational biographies (Morrice, 2009; Shakya et al., 2010), finances (Schammann & Younso, 2017; Jacqueline Stevenson & Willott, 2007), trauma and psychological distress (Earnest et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2018), the accessibility of reliable information (Bajwa, Couto, Kidd, Dibawar & McKenzie, 2017; Baker, Ramsay, Irwin, Miles, 2017; Stevenson & Willott, 2007) and a lack of role models and community support (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori & Silvagni, 2010; Naidoo, 2015).

A number of challenges arise from the institutional settings refugee students are confronted with when they apply to or enrol in HEOs. Studies show how institutional presumptions (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Berg, 2020), a lack of policies and political support (Luu & Blanco, 2019) and contradictory or mismatching requirements of being part of the asylum as well as higher education systems (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018; Farrell, Brunton, Costello, Delaney, Brown & Foley, 2020; Klaus, 2020) create structural difficulties for refugees' access to tertiary education.

Additionally, studies look into the support aspiring and enrolled refugee students receive, either by investigating online courses (Reinhardt, Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Deribo, Happ & Nell-Müller, 2018; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2018) or through conducting case studies of on-site programs (Bacher, Fiorioli, Moosbrugger, Nnebedum, Prandner & Shovakar, 2019; Brown, Chaudhari, Curtis & Schulz, 2018; Kreimer & Boenigk, 2019). Some publications focus on the description and evaluation of policy reactions (Jungblut et al., 2018; Toker, 2019; Unangst, 2019) and institutional support (Bajwa, Abai, Kidd, Akbari-Dibavar & McKenzie, 2018, Bajwa et al. 2017; 2019; Streitwieser, Schmidt, Brück & Gläser, 2018a; Streitwieser, Loo, Ohorodnik & Jeong, 2019).

While some studies point out institutional challenges and further implications for providing support for refugee students (Schammann & Younso, 2016, 2017), the institutional or organisational settings and responses themselves have rarely been analysed. One exception is an Australian case study by Webb, Dunwoodie, and Wilkinson (2019). They apply a neo-institutional framework in order to investigate shifting equity frames within a scholarship program for refugees and show how “homogenised institutional policies and practices to assess applications construct norms of access and equity, which create new exclusions for forced migrants “(Webb et al., 2019, p. 103). Further, refugees

are sometimes mentioned in the context of the internationalisation of higher education (Streitwieser, 2019), but this is usually done based on conceptual ascriptions, not on investigations of organisational practises or decision making. The papers included in this dissertation address this research gap by focussing on organisational responses to refugee students. They aim to provide insights to organisational motivations to support refugee students, their understanding of this new target group, and the way support structures are created and adapted within German HEOs.

1.5 Theoretical framework

Qualitative research designs mostly do not test but, rather, generate hypotheses. Therefore, they are usually not built on a pre-selected theoretical framework; they either aim to develop a theory or implement a theoretical framework throughout the research process (Flick, 2010). Instead of developing research questions and hypotheses based on a previously selected theoretical perspective, the selection of a theoretical framework for this study was closely connected with the research interest and first insights from the explorative pre-study.

In order to gain initial insights into how refugee students and especially their needs are represented in the field and exactly what support was offered for refugee students, I conducted an explorative pre-study. During the analysis, it became apparent that people in different positions throughout organisational units and hierarchies had provided the impulse for the development of support for refugee students in a decentral manner. Those impulses had resulted in formal support structures. Thus, one resulting follow-up research question regarded the formalisation of such decentral impulses to support structures for refugee students.

Another impression from the pre-study was that support for refugee students was realised in fixed-term projects that would help refugees meet general criteria. Both of those aspects implied that the short-term adjustment of service offers would – at least in most cases – not lead to lasting institutional changes. On the contrary, they rather seemed designed to adjust refugees to organisational expectations. Finally, offers for refugee students seemed to be path-dependently shaped by previously existing offers and ascribed needs of the target group. Those ascribed characteristics seemed to be shaped by the organisational perspective, as they usually referred to whether or how refugees could be supported to meet organisational standards. Further, the description of support for refugee students and especially references to challenges that could not be met by HEO support

structures emphasised the boundaries of responsibility and competence. Based on the assumption that organisational discourses determined offers for refugee students, the second main research interest was the perception of refugees within HEOs. This was divided in two research endeavours: first, the motivations to and expected benefits from supporting them and, second, the interplay of changing organisational discourses and structural support for refugee students at German HEOs.

In order to analyse the formalisation of support structures and individual support programmes as well as the underlying semantics, I decided to apply a systems theoretical framework. Most of the few studies that have looked into higher education for refugees from an organisational theory perspective have used neo-institutionalist approaches (Webb et al., 2019; Beigang, 2021). Thus, using a systems analytical framework adds a different angle to the emerging scholarship on organisational support for refugee students. Systems theory's focus on communicative compatibility allows a structured but flexible analysis of organisational decision making and structure development. While other approaches to institutional theory focus on the impact of the socio-political environment on institutional development (Webb et al, 2019, p. 208) or investigate organisational change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Streeck & Thelen, 2005) the systems theoretical perspective emphasises the limitations of those influences based on the selectiveness of communication between systems and their environment. Understanding the underlying boundaries and expectations of organisational discourse and, subsequently, decision making, creates an opportunity to explain practical challenges such as a lack of representation or the lack of responsible organisational units that Dunwoodie et al. (2020) found in their study on (mis)recognitions of refugee students at Australian universities. Finally, systems theory's focus on organisational decision making and its assumption of flexible changes that stabilise organisational core structures allow the investigation of structural development without the presupposition of organisational change.

1.5.1 The systems theoretical framework

In the following, I give an outline of the systems theoretical framework I used for the data analysis. Within the individual papers, specific aspects of Luhmann's systems theory that were crucial for the respective data analysis are presented in more detail.

Luhmann's theory of social systems understands modern societies as *functionally differentiated* in three types of systems: Society is seen as a *social system* that consists of *interactive* and *organisational systems* (Luhmann, 1975, p. 10). Each meaningful

interaction between people creates interactive systems (Luhmann, 1975, p. 9). While all systems are based on communication, organisations are mainly focussed on decision making based on specific rules and criteria.

Within society, *functional systems (Funktionssysteme)* include all communications regarding specific social functions, such as politics, medicine, education or science. They are sub-systems of the social system and co-exist without hierarchy. Organisations are elementary to functional systems, because they create structures that allow functional operations (Gensicke, 2008, p. 117). Organisational systems, however, are not necessarily part of only one functional system, but can be compatible with several of them. For example, a higher education organisation relates to the educational as well as the scientific functional system but will also have sub-units in relation to the political system.

In this context, *communication* is understood to be the combination of information, utterance and, finally, its understanding (Gensicke, 2008, p. 50; Luhmann, 2018[2011], p. 68). Communicative acts have to be received and understood in order to become meaningful communication. This does not mean that the intended information has to match its understanding, but the understanding depends on the recipient.

Systems consist of all compatible communications regarding one functional area. They reduce complexity by defining what is possible, doable and understandable in this area. This includes all topics, tasks, problems and decisions. The boundaries of a system are defined by possible and meaningful communication, reachability and understandability (Luhmann, 1975, p. 11). That means that social systems are *autopoietic*: They are self-referentially closed and reproduce themselves (Lobato Calleros, Chanlat, Bédard & Ramírez, 2014). Based on functional needs (Luhmann, 1970), systems create regular *structures* of (possible) communications that build generalised *communicative expectations* in order to ensure regularity, stability and durability. Structures become meaningful by reducing the complexity – and thus uncertainty – of the environment and defining a processable set of possibilities (Luhmann, 1975, p. 120).

Functional systems accomplish this through binary codes. In order to be compatible with a system, a communication has to be compatible with this code. Anything that is not part of a social system, and thus not compatible to the systems code, is its *environment*. This includes other systems: Politics and medicine, but also different organisations or departments within one organisation, are environmental to each other based on their communicative expectations. As a result, systems are not compatible with each other and effective inter-system communication – which for each system would mean

communication with its environment – is strongly limited. This is especially true because both systems will understand communications within their own expectations and logics (Gensicke, 2008, p. 67; Luhmann, 1986, p. 33). Because systems limit possibilities and therefore complexity, they are always less complex than their environment (Luhmann, 1970; p. 116; 1975, p. 9). It is important to note that there is not one environment, but, for every system, every communication outside its boundaries is its environment.

Systems constantly observe themselves and their environment. This constant state of *self-observation* and self-reflection allows them to differentiate themselves from their environment, but also to adjust their structures if necessary (Luhmann, 2018[2011]). Each system creates a *self-description*, “the production of a text or a functional equivalent of a text (e.g., indexical expressions such as ‘we’ or ‘here’ or a proper name) with which and by which the [system, e.g. the] organization identifies itself” (Luhmann, 2018[2011], p. 347). This self-description serves as organisational memory and “produce[s] the distinction between conformity and deviation, so that the system can let itself be provoked into deviation” (Luhmann 2018[2011], p. 348). Thereby, a system secures the distinction between itself with its expectable and thus acceptable communications and its environment. If a system has sub-systems, they produce their own self-descriptions. Self-descriptions allow a system to know which information it can produce and thus allow autopoiesis (Gilge, 2009, p. 51). Formal versions of such self-descriptions are mission statements of universities as well as their sub-systems, e.g. individual faculties or international offices.

Even though systems are environmental to each other and can only communicate within certain limitations, they are *structurally coupled*: Each system not only observes itself but also its environment. Environmental communications can cause *conflicts* by irritating a system’s expectations. This can result in structural adjustments. Thus, systems are at the same time self-referentially closed and open to their environment by structural coupling (Gilge, 2009). Applications of refugee students can be seen as one example of this: As we show in Berg et al. (2021), environmental factors such as the availability of funding schemes, the public expectation of supporting refugee students, and the rising numbers of refugee applications caused HEOs to consider how they could include them. Under other circumstances, applications that do not meet formal criteria and would thus not be compatible to formal expectations would not create a conflict but would be sorted out based on selection criteria. In the case of refugee students, however, we can observe how structural changes result from irritations of regular admission procedures.

Individual members of society are not included in only one system but, rather, are included in a variety of systems. That means one could go to school and attend a class in a school within the educational system, be part of a family (family system), and also be eligible to vote or to receive welfare (political system). Each system has its own requirements and conditions of inclusion and the combination and extent of belonging to different systems can vary individually. As a result, members are part of a system but also part of its environment: The sport clubs of two international offices' members might be the object of the interactional system 'cigarette break', but are environmental to the international offices. This systematic distinction of different sets of memberships to a number of systems that are environmental to each other allows conceptual insights to the situation of refugee students: As I mention in Berg (2018), the participants are aware of challenges for refugees that are not addressable by HEOs. The question of compatibility not only applies to refugees' applications, but also to the possibilities, extent and characteristics of organisational support.

While functional systems tend toward full inclusion of all members of society (Luhmann, 1980, p. 31), organisational systems usually have specific rules of membership and require their members to follow rules of behaviour. Membership has conditions and, within organisations, it is usually attached to a certain role: Refugees apply for the audience roles of students ('*Publikumsrollen*') (Kühl, 2011, p. 10), while the staff holds different performance roles ('*Leistungsrollen*') within HEOs. Those performance roles are attached to specific positions with a certain place within organisational hierarchy and a number of tasks and responsibilities (Kühl, 2011).

Individual motivations of members and organisational requirements are independent from each other but can be complementary (Luhmann, 1975, p. 12). In their complexity, organisations have a huge potential for complexity reduction, which allow for the emergence but also the regulation of conflicts in a more complex way than through interactions or within society at large (Luhmann, 1975, p. 18). In order to deal with conflicts, organisation members are required to follow certain programmes and hierarchies that frame organisational decision making, which are presented to them as the system's and sub-system's self-description(s).

One way to deal with increasing complexity is to make sure that selective rules, such as communication expectations, are generalisable and thus *transferable*, which means they are applicable to new scenarios (Luhmann, 1970, p. 126). If a certain conflict behaviour becomes normal, organisations can change their self-description, programmes

and structures. This *flexibility* allows innovation and stabilises organisations (Luhmann, 1975, p. 17) as well as structures in general (Luhmann, 1970, p. 120). It does also apply for sub-units or sub-systems within the organisation. In this case, the larger organisational system provides general criteria of transitions and also organises the closer environment of its sub-system (Luhmann, 1975, p. 19), such as other sub-systems or contacts to other organisational systems. Three main formal structures build organisations: decision programmes, communication channels and personnel. These were the main focus of the analysis of the formalisation of support for refugee students presented in one of the papers included in this thesis (Berg et al., 2021).

The main focus of this theoretical framework lies on communication and its compatibility. It can be seen as a rather open theoretical framework in the sense that it does not focus on management, hierarchy, predefined levels, positions or a specific set of organisational tasks, but allows a structured description and analysis of organisational units, tasks, structures and processes and their development. At the same time, it offers a framework to analyse underlying semantics. This allows investigating organisational rationales for and approaches to supporting refugee students as well as the question of how refugee students are perceived and positioned within HEOs.

1.5.2 Key terms

Based on their different foci, each paper introduces its central concepts in more details. Some terms, however, are crucial for the entire research project. This section introduces those key terms.

Boundary Position: To allow systems to meet environmental needs and expectations, information has to be exchanged and specific goals can be negotiated. This is the task of boundary positions (Luhmann 1976): They interact with different organisational sub-systems and specific systems outside of the organisation and pass on different communications. First contacts for refugees can be seen as boundary positions, as they are in touch with (prospective) refugee students as well as a number of other positions within their HEO. Thus, they can inform refugee students about the communicative needs of the organisation (e.g. formal application and enrolment criteria) and existing support offers but can also pass on information on the needs of refugee students and coordinate information between other sub-units in order to adapt goal programmes for the inclusion of refugee students.

First Contact: At all sampled HEOs, offers for refugee students included one or several first contact positions. First contacts are publicly identified as the go-to contact for refugee students, e.g. on the HEOs' websites. They do not need to literally be the first HEO members with whom refugees have contact but would usually be who refugees are referred to if they contact other positions. The exact tasks and competences of first contact positions often include counselling and the coordination of support offers but vary slightly between different HEOs and are discussed in greater depth in paper 3.

Higher Education Organisation: During the pre-study, I had used the more common term 'higher education institutions' (HEIs). However, my further analysis was based on an understanding of universities and universities of applied sciences as organisational systems. Thus, I refer to universities and universities of applied sciences as higher education organisations (HEOs).

Regarding the large variety of analytical and empirical approaches to study institutions and organisations, the terms 'institution' and 'organisation' are multi-faceted and used very differently depending on the research context. Generally, both terms seem to refer to coordinated cooperation. The main difference seems to be that the term 'institution' can be used more broadly and can include rituals, traditions and norms. Institutions can be created intentionally or emerge from (repeated) interactions. In contrast, organisations can be understood as intentionally created structures which aim to coordinate their members actions in order to reach specified objectives (Gukenbiehl, 2006). Understanding universities or universities of applied sciences as higher education institutions would rather emphasise their social task of producing and distributing knowledge (Kehm, 2012). On the other hand, conceptualising them as higher education organisations creates a focus on their internal structures, labour division and processes of decision making. As my research has centred on the formalisation of offers for refugee students and the underlying organisational discourse on refugee students, I proceeded to use the term higher education organisations throughout my main study.

Refugee Students: The usage of the term 'refugee' varies in everyday language and also in academic studies. In a legal understanding of the term, a refugee's claim for asylum already would have been accepted. Regarding my interest in discourses on refugee students, my analysis was based on the participants' understanding of the term. They rarely differentiated between asylum seekers and refugees but referred to people with the experience of forced migration as refugees ('*Flüchtlinge*' or '*Geflüchtete*'). In interactions

with counselling positions, the self-identification of refugee students seems determinative. Even though access to some support programmes is regulated based on the students' legal status, this was rather referred to as a practical differentiation and partly dismissed as unnecessary and, most importantly, did not seem to reflect on the interviewees' choice of words. Thus, the term 'refugee' mostly refers to people with the experience of forced migration. Refugee students are either participants in study preparation programmes or already enrolled in higher education.

Semantic and Discourse: Social interaction is based on common boundaries of meaning ('*Sinn*') that define possible thoughts, knowledge and actions. Semantic sets those boundaries in order to reduce complexity and avoid randomness (Luhmann, 1980). Discourses produce topic-specific meaning and consist of all system-internal communications regarding this topic (Stichweh, 2000). In contrast to poststructuralist discourse analysis, systems theoretical or functional structuralist discourse analysis does not focus on power dynamics or the people producing and shaping discourse; it is mainly concerned with the links between discourse and structures (Keller, 2011).

Organisational discourse on refugee students: I refer to organisational discourse on refugee students as a specialised system of meaning production that represents refugee students within higher education. It consists of all organisational communications regarding refugee students. Empirically, I was interested in how the interviewees understood and positioned refugees within their respective HEOs. Thus, my reconstruction of organisational discourses is mainly based on how the interviewees, as HEO members, perceived refugee students and how they described and assessed organisational policies and regulations.

Support structures and support programmes: Support structures include all organisational structures that are part of support for refugee students, such as positions and communication channels. They also include support programmes, which refers to specific offers such as language or academic classes.

1.6 Methods

My investigation of the rationales and organisational contexts that caused and determined the development of support for refugees at German HEOs followed an interpretative research paradigm and thus a qualitative study design (Flick, 2010; Helfferich, 2010; Wahyuni, 2012). The study design included an explorative pre-study and a main study with

two rounds of expert-interviews. Including all research phases, the dissertation is based on 27 expert-interviews with members of nine German HEOs.

1.6.1 Research interest

Interpretative research is based on the ontological presupposition that reality is socially constructed. It focusses on the subjective understanding and conceptual attributes of this reality, usually based on qualitative methods (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). Qualitative sociological research aims to understand the different aspects and complexity of a phenomenon. Therefore, it rather focusses on specifically selected contrasting cases in contrast to similar ones. The idea is to inductively or abductively ascertain from a selection of individual cases the underlying social structures and logics they are shaped by and thus represent (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003). The research process is usually designed as to be open as possible and closely oriented on the logics and realities of the field. This ensures that the entire research process, from the design creation and data collection to data analysis, is as open and object-oriented as possible (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003; Hoffmann-Riem, 1980).

My research focusses on understanding ascriptions and interpretations of actors in certain organisational positions in the field. It follows the assumption that their perception influences and is influenced by how organisational structures are shaped. In this case, their perception interrelates with whether and which support is offered for refugee students. The subjective interpretations of HEO members in formal positions related to refugee students can provide insight into organisational operations and defining rationales. In order to investigate those subjective interpretations, I decided to use a qualitative study design. My initial research interest was whether and how refugees are understood within the context of the internationalisation of German higher education and the presuppositions of support for refugee students. Since little academic research on the needs of and organisational support for refugee students had been done, I conducted an explorative pre-study with a focus on challenges, needs and support for refugee students from the perspective of members of German HEOs (Berg, 2018). Based on my exploratory research, my main study focussed on structural changes, the formalisation and further development of support structures, rationales to support refugees and the understanding of refugees in comparison to international students with no experience of forced migration. Finally, I identified different phases of the development of support structures and discussed them in the context of a third mission of social responsibility.

My aim was to follow the development of support structures at different HEOs throughout Germany. Thus, the design includes a longitudinal study of the development of support for refugees at German HEOs from summer 2017 to early 2020 (Flick, 2010, p. 187). After federal and state-level funding had become available in 2016, the programmes I looked into during the exploratory pre-study were usually in their first or second year. In late 2019 and early 2020, the initial federal funding period for Integra and Welcome had ended and the outcomes of applications for the next period were yet unknown. A similar development could be seen for state-level funded projects. The projects for refugees at the sampled HEOs were either in a phase of applications for a new funding scheme or had just ended. Except for the mere initiation of support for refugees, which could only be discussed retrospectively in the interviews, the timing of the design allowed insights regarding various project phases. It covered perspectives on early orientation and first experiences in 2017. Later, more experienced project members talked about the often adjusted projects in 2018. And finally, the interviews in 2019 and 2020 included either retrospective perspectives on ending projects or insights into a phase of new orientation towards follow-up projects.

1.6.2 Expert-interviews

Based on a constructivist understanding of the term, I define ‘experts’ based on a specific knowledge of and formal position within the field (Bogner, Littig & Menz, 2014). Following Kruse's (2015) approach, there are two specific forms of expert-knowledge: First, practical knowledge, which comes from practical experiences of working in a field. Second, abstract contextual knowledge, which allows for synoptic overviews of the field and is related to strategic positions.

Their formal position gives experts the competence to formally act within and influence or change the investigated structures and settings. In other words, their decisions (co-)construct the research field (Kaiser, 2014, p. 36). My research questions address reasons for and details of the development of support for refugees, as well as the positioning of refugees within German HEOs. They address aspects of strategic as well as practical knowledge of and experiences in the field. Thus, I sampled all interview partners based on their formal position and their practical and synoptic knowledge (Bogner, Littig & Menz, 2002; Kruse, 2015).

In this context, semi-standardised interviews have some advantage over more open interview forms. Following Pfadenhauer's (2009, p. 454) recommendation, I aimed for a

conversation at eye level, while still asking open questions and eliciting explanations instead of short or implicit answers. One important aspect of interviews with experts is time management. Many of my interview partners were worried about the length of the interview when scheduling an appointment. In most cases, the interviews took approximately 45 to 60 minutes, with a few shorter and longer exceptions. Overall, the structure of the guidelines helped me cover important aspects of my research questions, address case-specific details and also allowed for *ad hoc* questions.

Throughout all research phases, the interviewees were informed about research interests and the context of my research and were asked to consent to the recording, transcription and analysis of the interviews.

1.6.3 Study design

When I began this study, little was known about higher education for refugees and few international studies had looked into the topic (Berg et al., 2018; Mangan & Winter, 2017; Ramsay & Baker, 2019). Especially the organisational level had rarely been investigated. One of the initial questions that came up while conceptualising this research project was whether and how refugee students differed from other international students or, more importantly, whether and how HEO members differentiated between those two groups. Thus, the research design included an exploratory pre-study that provided first insights into how German HEO members perceive refugee students and the challenges they face in entering and obtaining higher education. Further, the explorative study provided an overview of measures that were taken to support refugee students in overcoming those barriers. In the context of the entire study design, the explorative study offered first insights to a fairly new field of research and allowed for the specification of research questions and the theoretical framework for the main study.

Based on insights from the pre-study and further theoretical consideration, the sample for the main study partly differed from the pre-study. Based on a systems theoretical framework, the main study provided an analysis of the formalisation of support for refugee students at German HEOs and the underlying organisational semantics. In the following, both study phases will be described in more detail, including information regarding the research interest, sampling and analysis.

Exploratory pre-study

During the exploratory pre-study, I aimed to investigate first experiences with and perspectives on refugee students and (the establishment of) support programmes. Thus, the sample needed to permit investigating different forms of practical and synoptic or strategical knowledge. In order to gain insights to more practical perspectives on organisational contact with refugees, I decided to interview the person that was named as first contact or counsellor for refugees on the HEO's website. Further, I contacted heads of international offices and, in the cases where such a position formally existed, also the vice presidents of internationalisation. As expected, those more strategically oriented positions generally had less or no contact with refugee students but were more closely engaged with the planning and implementation of their HEO's internationalisation strategies. The exploratory pre-study is based on eight expert-interviews and document analysis of mission statements and website information for refugees at five German HEOs, including three universities and two universities of applied sciences. The HEOs were chosen based on their offers for refugee students and their regional distribution across Germany: They are located in four states in different areas of Germany. In contrast, two of them are located in one city and closely cooperated in realising offers for refugee students.

The semi-standardised interview guidelines included questions on the formal position, tasks and contact to refugees. The majority of questions addressed the initiation and realisation of offers for refugee students, including the involvement of volunteers and actors throughout the organisation as well as the interviewees' perception of the needs of refugee students and the potential organisational benefits of supporting them. Further, I asked about the interviewees understanding and the organisational realisation of internationalisation at the respective HEO. Finally, HEO-specific questions about notable particularities in their offers for refugee students, their internationalisation strategy and their mission statement were included. The guidelines were adapted before each interview.

After all interviews were conducted, they were partly transcribed based on the pre-selected focus of data analysis. A synoptic table was created in order to be able to analyse and compare individual cases. Regarding the interviews, the table included details on the emergence and specifics of offers for refugees including formal attribution of competences within each HEO, the specific needs of refugees, reasons to support and expected benefits from supporting refugees, the understanding of internationalisation and diversification as well as the interviewees' positioning of refugees in that context, and emerging additional topics. For the document analysis, the table included aspects of the benefits and practical

implications of internationalisation and related networks. This procedure allowed for a broad overview of topics, interpretations and relevance within the field.

Mainly, the comparative analysis during the pre-study was focussed on if and how members of German HEOs perceive refugees as an individual target group and what measures are taken to support them. The underlying question of whether refugees should be seen as a group of their own has two general implications: First, it is a practical question for further research. If their situation were not different from other international students, it would make more sense to include them in more general research designs. Second, and in this context more importantly, it is a question of differentiations and relevance in the field.

The planning and realisation of the further research was shaped by the emerging aspects, insights from and results of this research phase. For example, the first contact positions turned out to be a crucial part of the developing support structures. Thus, they were not only included as experts during the main study, but their position was also more closely investigated during data analysis (Berg et al., 2021). Further, I decided to use a systems theoretical framework during the pre-study analysis.

Main study

The closer investigation of the initiation, formalisation and further development of support structures for refugees and underlying interpretations and communications of reality, which are addressed as semantics, was approached in a main study. The main study included a phase of expert-interviews as well as a second phase of follow-up interviews. They were conducted in spring and summer 2018 as well as late 2019 and early 2020. Building on the explorative insights from the pre-study, the main research interests were the formal development of support structures at German HEOs as well as underlying semantics.

In order to investigate the initiation and formalisation of support for refugee students at German HEOs, I cooperated with my colleagues Anja Gottburgsen and Bernd Kleimann. Together, we developed a sampling strategy that I used to extend and partly change the sample compared to the pre-study. As in the pre-study, the case selection was based on a regional cluster of eight HEOs, including four universities and four universities of applied sciences, from seven German states and regions. To provide contrast, the university and university of applied sciences from one city were further included in the sample. The main sampling criterion was the focus of each HEO's mission statement. They were sorted into two categories: first, HEOs that mainly focus on excellent research and

education while prioritising internationalisation and, second, HEOs that focus on equity and inclusion. Since most HEOs address both topics, a stronger emphasis made the difference. For each category, I selected two universities and two universities of applied sciences in consultation with my co-researchers. Since heads of international offices usually provided insights to strategical knowledge and vice presidents for internationalisation were difficult to reach, we decided to focus on heads of international offices and first contacts for refugees. Only those HEOs where both positions could be interviewed were included in the final sample. Three HEOs that were initially sampled for the main study had to be re-sampled. At one of them, I had conducted an interview with the first contact for refugees during the pre-study. The head of the international office seemed interested, but no interview could be scheduled. The other two were newly sampled for the main study. I conducted interviews with three first contacts, but not with the heads of their international offices. Thus, the interviews were not considered during the analysis.

The analysis for different research questions was done separately in individual steps and is described in the respective papers included in this dissertation.

In order to be able to follow the development of support for refugees, in addition to the main study's initial round of expert-interviews conducted in spring and summer 2018, follow-up interviews with first contacts were conducted in late 2019 and early 2020. These occurred at seven HEOs, providing insights into organisational challenges of providing and maintaining support for refugees and plans for further development or first impressions after the end of a project.

Theory and literature

Qualitative research designs do not primarily aim to test theories. They are usually based on knowledge of the current state of research and literature on the topic and refer to existing theories to explain empirical phenomena (Flick, 2010, pp. 71–80). Unlike linear study designs, which often begin with phrasing theory-based hypotheses, qualitative research design are often circular and apply theoretical and empirical insights to their findings throughout the research process. In this section, I describe the use of research literature and the application of the analytical framework throughout the study design.

As I have mentioned above, I conducted an exploratory pre-study in order to gain first empirical insights to the field. Additionally, I did two structured literature reviews throughout my study. First, my co-researchers and I performed a literature review of international empirical studies on refugees in higher education that were published between

January 1990 and January 2018 in the context of the WeGe-project (Berg et al., 2018). This literature review provided an important overview of topics and findings of the few existing studies, shaped the presuppositions my further research was based on, and supported the identification of research gaps, while the exploratory pre-study helped me to draft specific research questions within those gaps. During the pre-study, I contrasted my findings with insights from literature on the situation of international students in Germany.

During recent years, academic interest in the topic greatly increased and higher education for refugees emerged as a quickly growing research field. In order to keep up with those developments, I did a second structured review of literature on refugees in higher education that was published between 2016 and 2019. This review is included as the first paper of this dissertation. I also used this to finalise my main-study papers and to position my own research within the field. Since each of the research papers I have included in this cumulative dissertation had a different analytical angle and empirical focus, each occupies a slightly different position within the research field. This is represented in their respective literature discussions and conclusions.

Based on empirical insights from the pre-study, I decided to base my analysis on a systems theoretical framework. This overarching framework connects the individual analysis to one research design. However, similar to the changing importance of different findings and aspects of international literature, each of my research questions was connected to different theoretical aspects. The analysis of the formalisation of offers for refugee students is mainly based on systems theoretical contributions to organisational theory (Kühl, 2011; Luhmann, 2018[2011]), while the further analysis of organisational discourses on refugee students refers to Luhmann's (1980) deliberations on semantic as a way to produce boundaries of meaning in a functional differentiated society and Stichweh's (2000) statements on discourses as specialised systems of meaning production. Throughout the research process, empirical and theoretical considerations were closely interrelated. As I have previously described, I decided to apply a systems theoretical framework based on first empirical insights during the analysis of the pre-study data. In preparation for the main study analyses, the interview transcripts were topically pre-coded. The coding categories were deductively oriented around theoretical considerations and included the past and current states as well as expected developments of factors of organisational decision making, namely decision programmes, personnel, communication channels and recourses, which mainly referred to funding. Additionally, perspectives on refugee students were codes. Those deductive categories were inductively complemented with sub-categories and

codes throughout the coding process. This theoretically led pre-coding preceded the analysis for all main study papers. For each of the main study papers, the further analytical steps were based on the theoretical framework, which also determined the main focus of the final interpretation. At the same time, the exact theoretical focus was determined based on the specific research question of each paper.

Theoretical sampling and transferability

In the previous sections, I explained why I selected experts in specific professional positions. In this section, I describe the theoretical sampling strategy that led to the selection of the specific HEOs that were investigated and discuss the transferability of the results.

In order to look into a variety of cases, this research is based on a theoretical sampling. This means that the cases were selected based on specific criteria and according to their assumed relevance for the research questions (Mey & Mruck, 2009). During the explorative pre-study, the sampling was mainly based on the aim to cover different socio-structural contexts. Thus, HEOs from different German areas and cities of different sizes were selected. In contrast, one university and one university of science from the same city were sampled because they had applied for funding and realised their support for refugee students cooperatively. In order to be sampled, HEOs needed to offer support for refugee students. In order to look into a greater variety of offers, one HEO was added to the sample because it had a strong focus on online education for refugees. All sampled HEOs were public universities or universities of applied sciences. One university of excellence was included in the sample (BMBF, n.y.).

For the main study, HEOs' mission statements were included as an additional sampling criterion. It included two sets. Each set included four HEOs, more specifically two universities and two universities of applied sciences. The first set's mission statements mainly focussed on internationalisation and excellence, the second set's on social responsibility and widening participation. As most HEO's mission statements would fit into both categories, they were selected based on their main emphasis. A practical criterion was that interviews with at least one first contact for refugees and the head of the international office could be realised. At several HEOs, I could only interview the first contact for refugees. They were re-sampled and the interviews were not considered in the comparative analysis.

The final sample included eight public HEOs from cities of different sizes in seven different German areas in the North, South, West and East. Even though this had not been a sampling criterion, all sampled HEOs had received federal and/or state-level funding in order to support refugee students. The number of HEOs that could be investigated was mainly determined based on selecting four HEOs for each set and by the possibility of realising data collection and analysis in the time frame of this dissertation. However, as theoretical sampling should continue until theoretical saturation, it should also be noted that the selected cases seemed to provide a complex overview of minimal and maximum contrasts within the field.

The sample includes universities and universities of applied sciences. Their regional distribution is based on maximum contrast between socio-cultural contexts and German areas, but also one example of minimum contrast between a university and a university of applied sciences from the same city. Especially during the interviews that were conducted in 2017 and 2018, the stories of how support for refugee students was initiated, established and formalised were very similar. Even though most HEOs follow similar funding requirements, their individual realisations of support for refugee students seemed to become more diverse during later programme phases. Thus, the sample can show similarities but also differences in organising support for refugee students. Overall, the sample represents variety (types of HEOs, regional distribution, socio-economic context, specific strategies and realisations of support for refugee students, partly additional internal funding of support programmes), but also similarities (public HEOs, public funding for support programmes, and the contrast-case of cooperating university and university of applied sciences). The variety of cases in this rather small sample does not primarily aim to allow comparative research between specific cases but, rather, aims at extending the range of research. By identifying similarities and case specifics between HEOs in different contexts, the exact impact of those contexts cannot be measured. Nonetheless, the variety of the sample could allow insights into a greater variety of possibilities and, thus, different developments in the field. Therefore, maximum and minimum contrasts are important sampling criteria.

For example, during the interviews in late 2019 and early 2020, the first contacts reported different developments of demand and numbers of refugee students, which they directly linked to the continuation or discontinuation of their programmes. This data does not allow conclusions on the numbers of refugees in different areas, but it shows the importance of demand for the continuation of programmes and allows assumptions and,

potentially, hypotheses on the relevance of numbers of refugees in the area as well as the relevance of contact to the target group and other organisations that could inform refugees about the possibility to study. By including a greater variety of HEOs in the sample, however, it may be less likely to miss fundamentally different developments.

There could be regional or individual specifics or contrasts that were not covered by this sample. It does, however, provide insight into developments and sentiments in the field. It seems fair to assume that it shows dynamics and rationales that could be found throughout Germany's public higher education landscape and allows for developing working hypotheses for further quantitative investigations. For further research and in order to extend insights to the field, it may be interesting to investigate the development at HEOs that did not receive public funding for their programmes for refugees. This could not only affect the initiation but also the continuation of support programmes.

Research quality and limitations

When it comes to the quality, or trustworthiness, of qualitative research, different categories have been suggested and discussed in comparison to and distinction from quantitative methods. I will follow four criteria that are broadly referred to throughout the methodological literature (Flick, 2010; Wahyuni, 2012): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

First, *credibility* is given if the chosen instruments measure what researchers intend to measure and reflects the social phenomenon. It is therefore important to be transparent about case selection and sampling criteria, which I have described above. While my focus on two specific positions within HEOs enabled me to analyse specific perspectives on refugee students, it also has limitations: HEOs are complex organisations with a number of more or less connected, highly professionalised sub-systems. In order to look into the establishment of formalised offers for refugee students, I have focussed my research on two positions that are formally closely connected to either the strategic planning and implementation of internationalisation or the counselling of refugee students as well as coordination of support programmes. In one case, however, an interview with the head of an international office could not be scheduled because the potential interview partner did not see refugees as within the position's responsibility. This shows a potential sample bias based on self-selection: If interview partners that do not perceive refugees to be within the context of the internationalisation of their HEOs do not participate, the result will more likely point towards refugees as international students. This is best addressed with a strong

variety in the sample: The participating heads of international offices' self-description of their tasks covers a range from close engagement to no contact with refugee students, and the interview partners expressed different positions on whether refugees could be seen as international students. In this context, it should also be noted that I only conducted interviews with first contacts during the main study's second wave. On the one hand, this was because my research interest was the development of support for refugees, so I talked to the personnel applying and mostly also managing it. On the other hand, it was a research-related pragmatic decision to focus on one perspective, because scheduling interviews with as many heads of international offices as possible would likely have taken several months. One initial request for a follow-up interview with one head of an international office was immediately forwarded to the HEO's first contact. This only allowed focussing on the projects for refugees themselves; potential questions on strategical development within the context of the organisation had to be dismissed.

Second, *transferability* addresses whether research results could be applied in other contexts. It can mostly be ensured by thoroughly providing relevant information about the context and conditions of qualitative research. In the context of my research, providing thorough case-specific context information holds the risk of de-anonymising the data. This generally must be carefully considered, probably even more so for expert- interviews with people in distinctive positions. I provide an overview of my sample and a brief discussion of the transferability of my results in the previous section. The information, however, needs to remain somewhat vague in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, which should suffice since my research question does not focus on the specifics of, for example, internal networks.

Qualitative research draws conclusions from individual cases about general underlying social structures. As I have closely looked into a limited number of diverse cases, I can give insights into organisational developments and rationales. Nonetheless, this abstraction also means a loss of information on the exact composition of rationales, motives and organisational structures at each HEO. On the one hand, in-depth case studies could allow a closer investigation of the networks and structures of individual cases. On the other hand, case-based qualitative research is not *per se* generalisable or reproducible. The sampling criteria are meant to provide insights into a large variety of cases, but it cannot be ruled out that other contexts or individual cases might have produced different developments and outcomes or could have shed light on additional aspects.

Third, *dependability* concerns the repeatability of the research design, which I address by providing thorough information about sampling, data collection and theoretical framework. Data analysis is described in the respective papers.

Finally, *confirmability* ensures that the results match the data and that this connection is intersubjectively comprehensible and not based on the researcher's predispositions or perspective. This is often addressed by working in interpretation groups and discussing data and results. I did most of the data analysis alone, with the exception of the analysis of the formalisation of offers for the co-authored paper. In order to increase the confirmability of my research, I presented and discussed the results for the single-authored papers at several conferences, workshops or colloquia. In case of the co-authored paper, data processing and analysis were done in different steps. Each author coded and categorised different interviews in order to increase familiarity with the data. Further, analysis was done in several sessions. Finally, throughout the main study and especially during the second wave, I addressed and discussed central results with practitioners for respondent validation and frequently stayed in touch with other researchers.

1.7 Results

In the following, I will sum up the pre- and main studies' results. They are presented in more detail in the papers that are included in this cumulative dissertation.

1.7.1 Explorative pre-study: Challenges and support for refugee students at German HEOs

During the initial planning of my design, I asked myself whether refugees could be understood as a group of their own, distinct from other international students, and what potential differences could be. This differentiation was already given by the field: Structures had been implemented and the topic received increased public attention. Thus, my investigation focussed on the practitioners' perspectives on the specific challenges for refugee students in German higher education. Further, I asked which support was offered for refugee students at each HEO. The pre-study provided an overview of the field and first insights into the perception of refugee students from the perspective of first contacts, heads of international offices² and a vice president for internationalisation.

² In the respective paper, I also list 'members of international offices' (Berg, 2018: 221) as participants. This refers to a person that was listed as a first contact on the website but did not formally hold this position, whom I later referred to as one of the first contacts, and a vice-head of an international office, whom I later referred to as one of the heads of an international office during the main study.

Considering the lack of available research at the time, it seemed important to find out more about the specific challenges refugees face. Some studies have looked into those specific challenges from the perspective of refugee students (Grüttner et al., 2018; Schneider, 2018). Investigating a different perspective, I analysed the perspectives of HEO members working with refugee students or in relation to the internationalisation of German higher education. They can be seen as central actors in the field, partly shaping the institutional environment refugee students become involved with and also providing practical and conceptual insights into organisational perspectives. I decided to focus on the challenges for refugee students as they were described by HEO staff and set my results in the context of literature on challenges for international students with no experience of forced migration. Further, I used the study to obtain an overview of the mostly newly developed offers for refugees. Even though the participants showed their awareness of the generally difficult living conditions of refugees in Germany, the interviews as well as HEOs' support structures focussed on challenges directly connected to higher education for refugees (Berg, 2018).

Throughout all interviews, participants described the high motivation of refugee students. This motivation is confronted with various challenges and difficulties. The interview analysis showed that, compared to international students with no experience of forced migration, refugees face a number of similar but also specific challenges. Overall, the experts described hurdles similar to findings in other case studies (Berg et al., 2018; Stevenson & Willott, 2017). The interviewees referred to a number of similar challenges. Their variations arise from the circumstances of migration: Most international students prepare abroad to study in Germany. According to the interviewed HEO practitioners, refugees mostly did not plan to settle in Germany and usually arrive with little to no language proficiency. Thus, in contrast to other international students, they often only begin to learn German around or after their arrival. This is confirmed by a study with newly arriving asylum seekers: Brücker et al. (2016) found that 90% of newly arriving asylum seekers reported that they had no German language proficiency before entering the country. This can be seen an example of a similar but increased challenge in comparison with other international students. Finances are another similar but slightly differing challenge. Some interviewees emphasised that, unlike international students in general and depending on their residence status, some refugees are eligible for national welfare and student support. Ambiguity concerning the responsibility of institutions during study preparation and the

often precarious financial situation of refugees, however, still makes this a crucial challenge (Schammann & Younso, 2017).

Additionally, the interviewees described a number of specific challenges for refugee students that are caused by the circumstances of forced migration and the German asylum system. Among them are missing documents due to forcibly interrupted education or sudden migration, inhibited freedom of movement, and unfavourable living and learning conditions. Also, psychological distress because of experiences before, during and post migration as well as fear for the safety of friends and family remaining in the country of origin was repeatedly mentioned as an important factor throughout the interviews.

In summary, it can be stated that, depending on their individual situation, refugee applicants and students face a specific set of interconnected challenges. This partly leads to an accumulation and the creation of further difficulties that are also described by the study participants: The time refugees need to arrive in the receiving country, deal with pressing issues of the asylum system and basic sustainment, gather crucial and correct information about studying in Germany and then fulfil the formal criteria to apply at HEOs or for study preparation extends the gap in their educational biography and potentially adds financial pressure. Social isolation, which is described as a challenge for all international students, potentially slows the process of language learning even further. Often, as the participants described, alternative obligations related to family, job centres, or the multitude of bureaucratic requirements and appointments concerning their legal status limit the refugees' presence in preparatory courses.

Based on the empirical evidence, it became apparent that the specific challenges for refugees have consequences on different levels: First, language proficiency and the availability of documents are important formal access criteria and crucial to their ability to apply for and access higher education. Second, most challenges concern the living and learning conditions of refugee students. This can be the gap in their educational biography, which can result in a lack of learning routine. It can also be that, depending on their status, asylum seekers and some refugees are not permitted to relocate and are often offered housing in remote areas (Täubig, 2009), which can inhibit access to HEOs as well as their daily learning environment.

Another focus of the pre-study was to provide first insights into which support was offered for refugee students at the sampled HEOs and how it had been initiated. The interview partners described how, after the number of refugee applicants and counselling requests greatly increased, individual actors and offices at HEOs started to support refugees

and developed specific support structures. The document analysis showed that services and support provided by the sampled HEOs usually targeted study preparation and, as became apparent throughout the interviews, were path-dependently built on previously existing structures: All HEOs offered language classes, measures to support social integration and access to Wi-Fi and facilities like libraries. The participants emphasised that it was impossible for HEOs to address all challenges, even if they inhibit access to or performance in study preparation and higher education: Support mostly focussed on formal access criteria and many issues, such as housing or trauma treatment, were considered outside the responsibility and reach of HEOs.

The analysis showed that the realisation of individual offers depended on available structures. An example is psychological support for traumatised people, which is offered by one university that already had an existing programme working on the topic. The main objective seems to be to help refugee students fit regular admission criteria. Thus, it seems fair to state that after a large number of applications did not meet the communication expectations of regular admission, a set of specific support structures were implemented in order to deal with this irritation. This shows the flexibility of HEOs and also how this flexibility is used to obtain stability: HEOs did not change any of their basic structures but added additional structures in order to assist applicants with meeting standards. **I have published an overview of the main results of my pre-study in the second paper included in this dissertation (Berg, 2018).**

The comparative overview of challenges and support from the perspective of HEO members provided first insights to rationales for supporting refugee students and the newly developing structures. It showed great motivation, but also limits to supporting refugee students. During the pre-study I had decided on using a system theoretical framework in order to determine the compatibility of applicants and HEOs as well as how well offers met the perceived challenges of refugee students. Based on those first results it became apparent that it would make more sense to focus on universities and universities of applied sciences as higher education organisations instead of institutions, because I intended to study structural developments on an organisational level, such as the formalisation of new structures and the interconnection of organisational discourse and decision making.

1.7.2 Main study: Initiation, formalisation and development of support for refugee students

After the pre-study had provided a general overview of the field and was used to decide on a theoretical framework, I conducted and analysed further interviews in order to investigate the formalisation of support for refugee students as well as underlying organisational discourses.

Formalising organisational responsibility for refugees in German higher education: The case of first contact positions

As a first step, I collaborated with Anja Gottburgsen and Bernd Kleimann³ in analysing the formalisation of support structures for refugees. **The results are presented in the third paper included in this dissertation (Berg et al., 2021).** After the numbers of asylum seekers had already been rising for a few years, 2015 and 2016 saw a generally rather unexpected peak, leading to intense public debates on integration and participation. Soon, refugees were discussed as potential highly skilled professionals who might fill a gap in the German labour market (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018). The interview partners described a number of factors that caused HEOs to react to this emerging public discourse on education and labour market integration, as HEOs were expected to support and educate this group. At the same time, many of them received an increasing number of counselling requests and applications from prospective refugee students. Internally, pioneers created awareness and acted to support refugees. This initial action was described as decentral and as having taken place on all hierarchical levels throughout HEOs. Among the examples given were student counsellors who worked extra hours to cover additional requests, student initiatives, e.g. for social inclusion, refugee law clinics where law students provide legal counselling for refugees, and the academic as well as administrative staff and management who sought funds and partly extended existing service structures in order to fit the needs of refugee students. The quick availability of external funding was referred to as a crucial enabler of the initial or further development of formal support structures for refugee applicants and students. First reactions became formalised structures: the interview

³ My colleagues, Anja Gottburgsen and Bernd Kleimann, participated in creating the guideline I used for most of the main study's first wave's interviews and took part in topically coding them afterwards. Together, we developed a systems theory based analytical framework in order to analyse the formalisation of support structures for refugees at German HEOs in response to the refugee influx and held several interpretative sessions together. Our common analysis resulted in one of the papers included in this dissertation: Berg et al., 2021.

analysis shows that HEOs formally described new tasks and distributed responsibility for them, along with creating and defining new communication channels.

At all sampled HEOs, the formalisation of support for refugee students resulted in path-dependent support structures, mostly realised as a time-limited project for refugees. One central aspect of those structures is the first-contact position which usually is a part of those projects. The responsibilities of this position as they were described during the interviews include the counselling of refugee students and often also the coordination of offers for refugees. They can be seen as so-called boundary positions (Luhmann, 2018[2011], p. 178): They communicate with actors outside and also inside the organisation throughout different organisational units. Thus, they pass on information in a way that fits different recipients: They translate organisational expectations for prospective refugee students and identify and communicate challenges and needs as well as potential solutions to different parts of their organisation.

Throughout our analysis, the importance of personnel for the initiation, realisation and formalisation of structural change became apparent. Not only were all initiatives described to be based on previous engagement of pioneers, but, according to the interviewees, their insistence and motivation increased awareness and established supporting refugee students as an important aspect of HEOs' social responsibility. Further, the analysis showed that the exact realisation of newly formalised support structures depended on the personnel that was hired: At different HEOs, we could observe various communication channels when looking for internal and external networks. The formalisation of support structures usually led to the establishment of new connections, e.g. between international offices and local initiatives supporting refugees, but also between international offices and diversity management within HEOs. We could observe the influence of different hiring strategies: first contacts that had worked at the HEO before usually focussed on internal contacts, while those that had not worked at the HEO before and presumably been hired based on their experience with refugees focussed on extending external networks to other local or regional institutions.

Overall, the position of first contacts can be seen as an example of how HEOs formalise responsibility in the context of a specific challenge. They show flexibility in creating new structures and exploring solutions for a new target group while path-dependently relying on established strategies. However, the implementation of additional structures does not change the core functions or structures of HEOs. Quite the contrary, by supporting refugee students in meeting general criteria, the flexibility of creating additional

structures strengthens regular procedures. The support depends on personal engagement but also is based on mostly external funding. By creating time-limited projects to support refugees, HEOs maintain their flexibility; they explore a newly emerged problem, test a solution and keep the option of ending or adapting newly created structures. Regarding the time limit, the sustainability of support structures for refugee students remains open for further investigation.

7.2.2 Expectations, experiences and anticipated outcomes of supporting refugee students in Germany – A systems theoretical analysis of organisational semantics

Considering that HEOs did not collect information on the residence status of their applicants, it seems fair to assume that up to the point of newly established support for refugees, any application from a refugee that did not fit the HEO's formal criteria and did not succeed in the competition for limited study places would have not created any further stimulus than any other non-compatible application; it would have been merely dismissed based on conditional programmes of selection and admission. Similarly, successful refugee applications would not have been specifically noted. The interview analysis shows how internal and external factors led to a new awareness, or, on the organisational level, a new differentiation: Refugees had become a new target group. In order to better understand how refugees are perceived within HEOs, as a second step, my further analysis focussed on a better understanding of the discourse on refugees and rationales to support them. In this context, I also focussed on the initial research interest of whether refugees were understood as part of the internationalisation of higher education. **The results are discussed in the attached book chapter and fourth paper of this cumulative dissertation (Berg, 2021a).**

The participants described a number of expected benefits from and reasons to support refugee students that motivated them, their colleagues and pioneers at their HEOs. First initiatives were often connected to general altruistic motivations. Quickly, the resulting support for refugee students became connected with the rhetoric of either the HEO's or its sub-units' existing documents of self-description, such as mission statements or internationalisation strategies: Participants referred to internationalisation, diversification and social responsibility as reasons to support refugee students. The internationalisation and diversification of the student body, as well as taking on social responsibility and supporting students in need, were pre-existing ideas of a HEO's tasks beyond research and teaching that were then applied to a new target group. Internally, support for refugee students can be seen as a fulfilment of self-description and thus of HEOs' strategies and

tasks. This can also be applied externally: Throughout the interviews, support for refugee students was repeatedly described as a social responsibility HEOs must assume. On the one hand, this meant help for students in need. On the other hand, this meant training new experts for the German labour market. Both of those environmental outcomes were understood to be part of the general tasks of HEOs. In a way, the participants' references to social responsibility, internationalisation and diversification, and thus their references to general goals of their respective HEOs, imply that support for refugee students is well embedded in HEOs' general tasks and goals. However, such extensive support for a rather small target group needed justification. Partly, the participants mentioned explicit discussions on why this specific group received that much support. Beyond meeting external and internal expectations and goals, the participants also anticipated benefits for their HEO: They expected a new group of highly motivated students, contributing to a more diverse and international student body and thereby increasing the internationalisation at home. This means that refugees are understood to add to an intercultural experience on campus that is meant to motivate domestic students to go abroad but also to give them the advantage of making international contacts and obtaining intercultural skills at their home university.

Throughout the interviews, participants also emphasised a number of experienced benefits. These included a rise in voluntary student engagement and a new awareness of overly complicated bureaucratic procedures and organisational structures. Finally, they did refer to refugee students as a new group of international and diverse students and welcomed the new insights to their situation as a possibility to learn more about the needs of all international students.

This leads to the next question of the perception of refugee students within the context of the internationalisation of higher education: Even though internationalisation strategies and the expected benefits of an increased internationalisation at home are mentioned as reasons to support refugee students, not all participants would consider refugee students to be international students. Throughout the interviews, refugees were related to different aspects of internationalisation, which emphasises the multiple levels and facets of the process (Knight, 1994). Formally, internationalisation strategies provide the framework of supporting refugees and, in many cases, first contact positions are part of international offices (Schammann & Younso, 2016). Further, the formal classification as international students allows refugee students to access services for all international students. As the interview partners describe, however, the specific situation of refugee

students results in a slightly different set of needs than those of most international students. For example, depending on their legal status and the duration of their stay in Germany, refugee students might be eligible for public student support, which is not usually accessible for international students (Grüttner et al, 2018). Also, in addition to similar challenges such as social isolation and meeting language requirements, as seen in the pre-study, refugees are described as often facing a number of further hurdles, such as previous traumatic experiences, missing documents or a lack of preparation and support. According to the interviewees, this results in the need for additional support and thus formal and informal differentiations from other international students. As mentioned, refugee students are, however, perceived as international students in the sense that they increase the internationalisation at home. Overall, most interview partners argued for integrating refugee students with all international students quickly, which would also include merging support structures, in order to reduce potential stigmatisation.

Due to the quick initiation and formalisation of support structures for refugees, programmes seem to rather be built upon practitioners' expectations of what refugee students might need than on experience with the target group. As the interviews conducted in 2018 showed, most programmes had been adjusted in reaction to experiences with and feedback from refugee students. For example, in some cases, the timing of language classes had been adjusted to accommodate other obligations, such as the timing of obligatory integration courses. This can be seen as an example of the flexibility of organisations: Structures were built on expectations. Some of those expectations had not been met and were thus problematic, which led to adjustments based on experience. In this way, the discourse on refugee students can be understood to change along with expectations, which can result in structural changes. In comparison with the pre-study interviews from 2017, during the interviews in 2018, participants showed more confidence in understanding the needs of refugee students and meeting those needs within the realm of possibilities of their respective HEOs. Instead of insecurity regarding how support would match the needs of the target group, the future of the programmes had become the major concern. Different HEOs were either planning to expand and further adjust, maintain, or end their engagement of refugee students. Thus, I conducted a second wave of main-study interviews in late 2019 and early 2020 in order to analyse the further development of offers for and organisational discourses on refugee students.

From 'international' to 'refugee' to 'international students': The interplay of discourses on refugee students and the development of support structures at German higher education organisations

In order to analyse the further development of support programmes and organisational discourses on refugee students, the final part of the main study is based on all 25 main-study interviews, including interviews with ten heads of international offices from 2017 and 2018, with eight first contacts from 2017 and 2018, and seven follow-up interviews with first contacts from 2019 and 2020. **Paper 5 shows the results of an analysis of the interdependent development of organisational discourses on and offers for refugee students.**

As the previous analysis of organisational discourses on refugee students showed, the need to justify the resources that were put into supporting this new target group, and the need to define formal access criteria to newly created support structures, had led to the establishment of refugees as a target group of their own. During the early phases of the support programmes, the interviewees often argued that refugees had specific needs or otherwise differed from other international students and thus had to be seen as a group of their own. In order to quickly integrate them, however, some HEOs took very early actions to integrate refugee students into regular offers for international or all other students as soon as possible.

This general aim of integrating offers for refugee and international students was reflected in the follow-up call for applications of the federal funding scheme: After the first call for the funding period from 2017 and 2019 had specifically asked for projects that would support refugees in preparing for German higher education, the call for the next funding phase added continuous support from study preparation to student support and help with access to the labour market. It also explicitly included the aim to integrate offers for refugees with those for all international students (DAAD, 2016, 2019).

The initial differentiation of refugee students had been needed to establish them as a new target group and to justify specific support. Changing funding conditions and the notion of quicker integration in integrated courses, however, caused a shift in organisational discourses. Refugee students began to be compared to rather than differentiated from international students throughout the interviews: They were considered international students again. In 2019 and 2020, the interviewees rather emphasised similarities between those two groups instead of describing the specific needs of refugee students. This is mainly reflected in three developments: First, the interviewees described

a perceived chronological shift throughout different study phases: While refugee students needed additional support in study preparations, their differentiation from international students should become increasingly obsolete after their enrolment. They might still need support to catch up with academic practices, but the questions and challenges would continue to become more and more similar to those that all international students or even all students face. Secondly, some interview partners feared to socially isolate refugee students and thus set the objective of allowing them to become “regular international students” (U1E3T1, first contact for refugees) as quickly as possible. Finally, as the practice of opening offers for all students or creating integrated offers for international and refugee students proceeded, the formal differentiation of refugee students lost importance, as it already had existed largely to regulate access to specific support structures. HEOs had not begun collecting information on the legal status of their enrolled students, which reduced the formal usefulness of this newly created category to a very narrow spectrum of individual courses.

At the time of the follow-up interviews, six HEOs had applied for funding in order to continue their offers for refugee students. Their plans for the next funding phase reflected the new funding conditions and changing discourse and were oriented around the decreasing importance of the refugee status throughout the study phases.

The data analysis shows that functional needs, organisational discourses and structure development are interrelated and interdependent. Only after the functional need to formally identify and differentiate refugee students became apparent did a related organisational discourse emerge and shape the newly established or extended support structures for refugee students. In the context of changing funding requirements and increased experiences involving refugee students, discourse and structures were adapted to fit changing functional needs.

It seems, therefore, not surprising that throughout the earlier interviews, the main distinction between refugee students and other international students seemed to be based on the specific needs of forced migrants: As the discourse’s main functions seemed to be the legitimisation of specific offers and identification of appropriate support measures, it is in a way designed to be deficit-oriented. The introduction of a chronological differentiation that intended for refugees in study preparation to become regular students and alumni throughout their education does not overcome this deficit discourse but, rather, seems to aim at supporting refugee students to quickly overcome their specific challenges. In contrast to this deficit orientation, as previously described, the interview partners’

perspectives on support for refugee students also included a number of expected organisational benefits. Thus, the discourse on refugee students could offer the chance to combine debates on and assessments of benefits and needs (Karram, 2013).

1.8 Conclusion

During an explorative preliminary study and a qualitative main study, I analysed 27 expert-interviews with members of nine German HEOs. Additionally, the pre-study included a document analysis of the mission statements and internationalisation strategies of five HEOs. I explored different stages of support programmes for refugee students, with a focus on the reasons HEO members gave for supporting refugee students and the first formalisation of support structures. Further, I discussed support for refugee students in the context of the internationalisation of higher education and showed how existing structures, previous experiences, and discourses and expectations shape and are re-shaped by the development of new structures. From matters of social and academic integration to the question of responsibility for and ways to address the issue of a certain target group, my research encountered questions of compatibility. Its focus on communicative expectations and compatibility thus made systems theory a helpful theoretical framework for analysing the motivations, approaches and limitations of support for refugee students at German HEOs. By emphasising how a certain flexibility stabilises organisations, it also offered a basis from which to understand the project-based creation of support structures within the context of regular organisational operations.

1.8.1 Project phases and their challenges

Based on a final analysis of the follow-up interviews with first contacts that I conducted in 2019 and 2020, I looked into late stages of the initial support projects and reconstructed different phases of programme initiation and development after HEO members had identified the need to act and support refugee students. Each project phase was accompanied by specific challenges. **In the book chapter that is the fifth paper included in this dissertation, I describe these project phases and their respective challenges, discuss support for refugees in the context of HEOs' third mission and list possibilities for enabling HEOs' further support for refugee students (Berg, 2021b).**

The interviewees described an initial *decentral voluntary engagement* that was based on a large variety of supportive acts throughout different levels of the organisational hierarchy and within different sub-units: Members of international offices and student counsellors worked extended hours to counsel refugees, students initiated social activities

and counselling offers such as refugee law clinics, and management positions such as heads of departments and presidents sought funding for structural support of refugee students.

Existing formal structures were rapidly altered and/or supplemented with additional offers for refugee students: The analysis showed that initial direct action was followed by the *formalisation of offers for refugees* (Berg et al., 2021). This step was based on external and partly internal funding and included the establishment of formerly mentioned first contact positions and offers, primarily those in support of study preparations for refugees (Schammann & Younso, 2016). The interviewees described a number of challenges during that phase and especially emphasised the unavailability of qualified personnel, infrastructural resources such as enough rooms for additional courses, and a general insecurity regarding how to approach the specific challenges of this target group. In the beginning, little or no guidance or experience was available.

When considering those early phases and the reasons given for initiating and formalising support for refugee students at German HEOs, the study participants repeatedly referred to internationalisation and diversification, but also a general social responsibility or a third mission (Berthold, Meyer-Guckel & Rohe, 2010, E3M, 2012; Predazzi, 2012). This third mission refers to an increasing expectation of communication and exchange between HEOs and their environment. Beyond their core tasks of research and teaching, HEOs are expected to respond to social challenges and contribute to social development. This includes taking on social responsibility. The third mission is usually included in HEOs' self-descriptions and mission statements. Generally, the term 'social responsibility' remains vague and can thus be connected to new tasks or target groups, such as, in this case, refugee students, as is shown by the interviewees' references to mission statements that do not specifically mention refugee students. By creating offers for refugee students, vague mission statements are given a concrete meaning: 'There are no self-evident topics or actions of social responsibility, but expectations have to be communicated and prioritized' (Berg, 2021b). Further, the realisation of offers for refugee students that focus on preparing them to be successful applicants and students reinforces and thus stabilises the core tasks of research and teaching, which can be interpreted as an example of the stabilising effect of organisational flexibility (Luhmann, 1975, p. 17).

Later interviews show that, along with the availability of funding and the establishment of programmes for refugee students, information material, workshops and guidelines became available, and regional as well as national networks were established. Based on this input and local experiences with refugee students, the next phase was the

adaptation and stabilisation of offers for refugee students. The interview analysis suggested that initial worries had been replaced by increasing routine. The main challenges during this phase seemed to be personnel changes and worries about further funding of the programmes. Mostly, the time-limited projects meant time-limited contracts for first contacts. As shown by a few cases in the sample where first contact positions needed to be newly staffed, personnel changes often meant re-orientation not only for the new employee but for the entire project.

Up to this point, the development seemed to be fairly similar at all investigated HEOs. The last interviews, however, showed structural changes and the *diversification of further developments of offers for refugee students.* All initial projects had just ended or were about to end. Overall, two developments could be discerned: the application for further funding or the end of specific support for refugee students. In one case, no application for further funding had been submitted and support for refugee students ended with the ceased project funding in late 2019.

In most cases, the project members had applied for further funding. The applications were described as including new outlines for follow-up projects and, thus, further structural changes to offers for refugees. Commonalities included the integration of offers for refugees with offers for all international students, a stronger focus on support throughout refugee students' studies, and labour market access. Additionally, each HEO included path-dependent specific offers, for example, cooperation with local businesses to provide access to internship positions or an increased use of social media to reach the target group. Most of those changes depended on external feedback, e.g. from network partners affiliated with other HEOs and members of the target group, on internal feedback, e.g. from teachers, and on changed requirements for further funding.

During this late project phase, the main challenge that was mentioned among those who had applied for further funding was insecurity because the outcome of those applications was still unknown at the time of the interviews. Further, no data-based assessment of the success of study preparation programmes was possible because no data was collected on the legal status of study applicants. The interview analysis showed that new aspects of support programmes, such as labour market access, were accompanied by new insecurities regarding how to realise them. Those concerns, however, were not yet pressing, because the realisation of potential further support for refugees was yet to be determined based on external funding decisions.

Viewing the initiation, formalisation and further development of support structures for refugee students as separate topics clarifies possible challenges for HEOs that want to offer services for refugees and to find ways to overcome those challenges. First of all, the importance of personnel in recognising the need to act and initiate action and strategies must be emphasised (Webb et al., 2019). In order to establish new structures and formalise this initial action, the availability of funding is crucial. Further, trained experts, information and guidance, and external networks are presented as important factors. Due to their limited scope of action, HEO members emphasise that their support programmes can only address some of the challenges that refugee students face. A number of aspects, such as housing, stressful (learning) environments, mental health, etc. cannot or can only partly be addressed by HEOs, because these aspects are outside their specific tasks and not consistent with their compatible communication. Those factors, however, will likely influence student success. Thus, supporting refugee students is a social task beyond the responsibility of HEOs. Finally, taking on social responsibility should be incentivised for HEOs, e.g. by making it part of university rankings.

1.8.2 Responsiveness and responsibility

In the context of research on forced migration, the need to prioritise the perspectives of asylum seekers and refugees has repeatedly been emphasised (for an overview of different approaches to research with refugees, see Berg et al. 2019a) and many publications primarily focus on analysing the perspectives of refugee students (Grüttner, 2019; Hartley, Baker, Fleay & Burke, 2019; Lenette et al., 2019; R. Student et al., 2017; J. Stevenson & Baker, 2018). Among other factors, their experience and ability to navigate in the receiving country, however, largely depends on organisational contexts. Regarding the welfare system, Schammann (2015) has shown the importance of individual case workers for different realisations of policies. Thus, in addition to understanding refugees' perspectives, it seems important to understand the perspectives of actors who shape those conditions. Looking into the initiation, formalisation and further development of, as well as rationales behind, offers for refugee students provides a better understanding of the motivations and expectations of those actors. In the context of systemic boundaries, those motivations and expectations shape institutional environments. Understanding relevant actors' perspectives on refugee students thus seems crucial in order to analyse challenges and the scopes of actions for refugee students, as well as to identify potential misunderstandings and limitations to organisational support.

Support for refugee students in Germany can be seen as an example of how HEOs respond to timely challenges and social expectations or, in other terms, of their responsiveness and organisational responsibility. “Corporate social responsiveness comprises the processes of issues management, stakeholder management and environmental scanning.” (Black, 2006, p. 26). In the case of projects supporting refugee students, external funding schemes and also HEO members can be seen as stakeholders. The interview analysis shows a number of internal and external factors required for HEOs to react. The mere existence of refugee applicants and students did not suffice as a motivator, as refugees studied in Germany before 2015 but were almost entirely unaddressed by any initiatives or specific support structures. The interviewees mentioned a number of motivators accompanying the initiation and formalisation of offers for refugee students: Increased numbers of counselling requests, public interest in the topic, the engagement of HEO members (see Slack, Corlett & Morris (2015) regarding the importance of employee engagement for corporate social responsibility) throughout different sub-units and levels of hierarchy, and the opportunity for external funding resulted in the initiation and quick formalisation of offers for refugee students in the form of time-limited projects, usually including a first contact position (Berg et al., 2021).

In order to support this specific target group, HEOs had to create communicative compatibility. The first phases of decentral engagement and the formalisation of offers depended on re-phrasing the issue of refugee students within the organisations’ boundaries, responsibility and competence. First of all, awareness for this specific target group had to be established by creating a formal differentiation from other international students (Berg, 2021a). Generally, legal status is environmental information and not further regarded by HEOs. They still do not collect information on the legal status of their students. On the one hand, this allowed refugee students to apply in the same way as other students. On the other hand, it also had created a blind spot for the specific challenges refugee students face because of their situation. In order to address refugee students within the systemic logic of their HEOs, HEO members needed to identify factors that challenged refugees’ applications and study success or, in other words, factors that prevented them from meeting the HEOs’ communicative expectations. In this context, it seems little surprising that the discourses surrounding refugee students seem deficit-oriented when their function is to identify needs and potential support strategies (Berg, 2022). Overall, my analysis shows five main points:

First, systemic boundaries limit organisations' scopes of (and interests in) action. Thus, the way they take on social responsibility has certain systemic boundaries: It is limited to assisting them in meeting the expectations of the very organisation that is supporting them by becoming acceptable applicants and successful students. The data shows that realisation of engagement for refugees happened within the context of HEOs' boundaries, using HEO-typical formats, such as courses or specific social events, in order to support refugees' aims to fit HEOs' communicative expectations, such as admission criteria. Even if individual members might be aware of broader issues and challenges for refugees, the support typically remains within those systemic boundaries. This can be seen as an example of how HEOs address their third mission in addition to and closely attuned with their first two missions of research and teaching (Henke, Pasternack, Schmid & Schneider, 2016, p. 14).

For example, all sampled HEOs offered study preparation for refugees. They usually addressed formal access criteria by offering academic and language courses conducted by trained professionals. In addition, offers for social integration usually happened in formats that had previously been established for other international students. These were often at least partly carried out by students. Arguably, aspects such as remote housing, group homes or concern about the safety of relatives and friends can also influence study success. Even though HEO members are aware of a number of additional challenges for refugees, they argue that addressing them would either be outside HEOs' responsibility or their competence. As Dunwoodie et al. (2020) have shown, this can result in practical challenges for refugee students who struggle to identify organisational units that are responsible for their concerns. Another aspect is that new structures do not necessarily cause or imply organisational change but can be used to adapt individual structures in order to stabilise the organisation's core functions in what could be called a flexible conservation of central functions and structures.

Second, successful support for refugee students depends on a number of organisations and actors. Even before funding schemes became available, support for refugee students at the sampled HEOs was initiated by decentral voluntary acts of pioneers. This emphasises the importance of personnel for organisational responsibility. However, even with refugees' best interests in mind, some HEO members described difficulties with other organisations. Many refugees depend on social welfare and, thus, are to some extent depending on their Jobcentre-caseworkers. Some first contacts talked about experiences where attendance in study preparation programmes or applying at their HEO was made

impossible by the decision of Jobcentres that wanted refugees to access the labour market. Also, refugees were described as missing classes in order to attend appointments in relation to their asylum procedure or welfare. In those cases, organisational interests did not match; the political and the education system can have different and partly contrary goals (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018).

The first two points refer to divided responsibilities and system-specific different ambitions. This emphasises the importance of awareness and support throughout organisations and individual actors. Otherwise, contradictory objectives, rules and requirements of different systems can result in the creation of additional challenges for refugees in obtaining higher education and in other areas of life.

Third, representation matters and makes a difference when it comes to the realisation of support programmes: Due to a lack of experience with and manuals on support for refugee students, the initial offers were based on HEO members' assumptions about the needs and potential of refugee students. The interviewees explained that in some cases support offers did not match refugees' expectations or did not meet their needs. For example, refugees were described as having shown little interest in visiting classes without collecting credits (Schammann & Younso, 2016). Thus, the presumptions and – if possible – support structures partly had to be altered. This learning-by-doing approach seemed to be necessary to ensure quick responses to the increase in refugee applications in 2015 and 2016, and growing experience arguably leads to improved offers. However, it can also result in additional challenges for the students who are part of first experiences. Thus, it seems imperative to further investigate the perspective of refugee students and triangulate expectations and experiences of HEO members and refugee students regarding the need and reality of support for refugee students. This is especially important in the context of the end of the first programmes and the beginning of follow-up projects with a new focus on study success and access to the labour market. It seems important to develop offers in close coordination to the feedback and needs of the target group.

Fourth, the interviews showed that support for a specific group had to be legitimised, which was done by connecting refugee students to existing concepts within organisational self-descriptions: Establishing support structures for refugee students was accompanied by establishing connections to the rhetoric of internationalisation, diversity and social responsibility. This emphasises the importance of generic or vague mission statements and documents of self-description. They can be applied to new target groups and ensure internal 'value-attuned communication' (Black, 2006, p. 31). Thus, they are

among the “systems, policies and procedures to assure social responsiveness (Black, 2006, p. 26).

Fifth, the organisational responsibility for refugee students at the sampled HEOs was attributed to a specific position that was created in order to counsel refugees and manage all offers for them: the first contact position. This boundary position is the communicative junction between internal and external communications and, thus, is responsible for (at least being aware of) all organisational operations that affect refugee students. When the projects end and this position is no longer available, certain offers might still exist, but there is no position that accumulates target group-specific knowledge. Thus, first contact positions can be seen as the key to organisational responsibility for refugee students at German HEOs, because they collect, preserve and provide specific knowledge of the target group and related organisational structures. This is emphasised by one case in which the support project had ended and all refugee-specific structures, including the first contact position, had ended with the project deadline.

In this context, it should also be noted that many HEO members argued for a quick integration of offers for refugee students with offers for all international students in order to prevent stigmatisation. Thus, they welcomed and reinforced plans to integrate support for international and refugee students. In a way, this notion is supported by the analysis of Klaus (2020), who pointed out the constant need for identity management for refugee students. An interesting follow-up question would be how refugee students perceive their position within HEOs and how their self-identification influences their utilisation of support offers for refugee students, international students and all students.

1.8.3 Research desiderata

The results presented in this thesis offer an organisational theory approach to understanding offers for refugee students. They show that offers for refugee students can be seen as an example of organisational responsiveness, decision making and flexibility and indicate a number of follow-up research questions. As previously described, the research presented in this dissertation covers a certain time frame (2017–2020). During that time, extensive external funding had allowed HEOs to create and maintain support structures for refugees. The sustainability, however, of those time-limited projects remains in question, and the results and success of HEOs’ initiatives for refugee students are yet to be determined. This could include the question of which factors determine the success of the program from different perspectives: As Young et al. (2017) have shown, the political and educational

systems can have different expectations. In the context of increasingly diverse approaches to supporting refugee students, further research could not only evaluate individual projects but also examine whether and how different strategies of integrating refugee students influence the self-perception, aspiration, integration and academic achievements of refugees in higher education. One example would be investigating whether labelling offers as ‘for refugees’ or ‘for internationals’ influences refugees’ response. In the context of the Covid-pandemic, questions of successful support programmes have become more urgent. On the one hand, this provides yet another opportunity to study organisational responsibility and individual coping mechanisms. On the other hand, some measures that have been used to support refugee students, such as online courses, are now of interest for wider use. Thus, follow-up research could look into whether and how the experience with refugee students has influenced how HEOs and preparatory colleges have adapted their offers during the Covid-pandemic.

Whether or not current experiences lead to long-term organisational change with refugees as a new target group also remains a question for further investigation. Based on my current results, it seems more likely that it will continue to be a matter of time-limited projects. However, the question remains, if and how HEOs will apply their current experiences for future refugee applicants or potentially other target groups. In other words, the transferability (Adomssent, Godemann & Michelsen, 2007) of current strategies and experiences remains open for investigation. One limitation of my research is a strong focus on international offices with the exception of a few first contacts who were affiliated with different offices. It would be interesting to investigate engagement and the realisation of support and policies throughout different academic and administrative sub-units of the university. It should specifically be noted that student engagement has yet to be explored. In order to examine the compatibility of offers for refugees with their needs, further research with refugee students, as conducted within the WeGe-project, is necessary.

An interesting follow-up question results from the function of the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD): After the Federal Ministry of Education and Research provided 100 Million Euros for the first Integra funding phase (2017–2019), it mandated the DAAD to administer those funds. Thus, the call for application and further coordination and management of Integra offers was the DAAD’s responsibility. In a way, they mediated between the Ministry, a sub-system of the political system, and HEOs, each a sub-system of the education system. Thus, the DAAD could be seen as a boundary organisation or, rather, as an organisation that includes boundary structures. This task does

not define the DAAD in total, but apparently organisations can be in the situation of needing to mediate or translate communications between other organisations that would otherwise not be able to understand each other. If entire organisations, sub-organisations or structures were primarily created for the purpose of such inter-system translations, it might be interesting to expand the concept of boundary positions and apply it not only to positions, but also to sub-units, and also on a larger scale.

Another interesting aspect concerns the division of HEOs into academia, administration and students. Research on HEOs has often focussed on the first two. Further organisational research could focus more on the interrelation between HEOs and their students. Also, topics like support for refugee students need coordination throughout different academic, administrative and partly also student organisational sub-units. This could be an interesting opportunity to investigate internal support structures. Finally, further research could further investigate the processes and factors of organisational decisions related to the exact realisation and potential continuation of support for refugee students as an example of organisational decision making (Begičević, Divjak & Hunjak, 2010; Calleros et al., 2014).

2 Refugees in higher education: An integrative literature review of recent themes, methodologies and omissions

Jana Berg

Abstract

During recent years, the number of publications on higher education for refugees increased heavily, forming a dynamic new research field. This integrative review discusses 103 journal articles, book chapters, and monographs that were published between 2016 and 2019. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of recent topics, trends, and results in this newly emerging field. First, this paper gives an overview of the methodology of research with and on refugee students. Further, it shows rationales to support refugee students and sums up challenges for refugees and asylum seekers in entering and obtaining higher education as well as institutional contexts as they are discussed throughout the literature. Finally, the review discusses changes and trends of the emerging field of higher education for refugees and identifies open research questions. It seems advisable to increase the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches, including more comparative, multi-perspective, and multi-level studies.

Keywords

Higher Education for Refugees, Literature Review, Integrative Review, Equity and Inclusion, Refugee Students

2.1 Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is reporting “the highest levels of displacement on record” (UNHCR, 2019a) of 70.8 million displaced people worldwide, including 25.9 million refugees and estimates that only about 3% of refugees are enrolled in tertiary education. Notably, this estimation changed from 1% in 2019 based on various factors, including the success of funding programmes (UNHCR, 2019b). Even though the right to education is a Human Right and the importance of refugee education has been widely acknowledged (UNESCO, 2018; United Nations, 2019), social engagement, as well as academic studies, used to almost exclusively focus on early childhood, primary, and secondary education (Dryden-Peterson, 2010).

Before 2016, studies on tertiary education for refugees were sparse and usually based on “primarily exploratory, qualitative investigations with (sometimes very) small case numbers” (Berg et al., 2018, p. 82). Along with growing social interest and newly developing initiatives to support (prospective) refugee students, a growing body of academic literature has been investigating aspects of higher education for refugees. Probably due to the availability of only very few previously published studies, and partly also close connections to individual support programmes for refugee students, many studies had similar foci on the experiences of refugee students, access and transition challenges, as well as case studies of institutional support. Nonetheless, the quickly growing body of literature also led to a greater variety of methodological and theoretical approaches, new research questions, and partly new regional foci.

Previous literature reviews have looked into research on higher education for refugees until early 2018 (Berg et al., 2018; Mangan & Winter, 2017; Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Reinhardt, 2018), but this integrative review (Torraco, 2005, 2016) seeks to provide both a comprehensive overview of the main topics, findings, and trends of recent developments and a discussion of open questions in this quickly emerging field. It, therefore, sets a focus on academic literature on higher education for refugees that has been published between January 2016 and December 2019. It can be read as an orientation to understand the current trends of an emerging research-field and provides suggestions and implications for further research.

First, I describe the methodology and methods this review is based on (2) and proceed to give a general overview of central topics I found in the literature (3): the methodology of research with refugee students (3.2), rationales and reasons to support them (3.3), challenges for refugee students (3.4), and institutional contexts (3.5). Finally, I discuss the reviewed literature and develop a research agenda for further studies on higher education for refugees (4).

Regarding the terminology, refugee and asylum seeker are terms that are used in various ways and with different connotations in everyday language and academic studies. Both terms cover a broad variety of living situations in diverse personal, structural and national contexts (McBrien, 2005). In this review, I describe the findings of studies and conceptual papers with different definitions of those terms. Refugees and asylum seekers were either identified based on their legal status (Mupenzi, 2018) or their self-identification (Sheikh, Koc, & Anderson, 2019). The studies that define refugee students based on their migration experience usually do not discuss the specifics of different legal statuses or

outcomes of asylum applications. Throughout this review, I generally refer to ‘refugee students’, meaning students in higher education or preparatory programmes with the experience of forced international migration. In this context, asylum seekers are refugees who are waiting for the outcome of their asylum application. Thus, this term gives an additional information about their legal status. Throughout this review, I only refer to asylum seekers when they have been specifically mentioned in the discussed publications.

2.2 Methods

Informed by literature on the methodology of systematic reviews, this paper provides an integrative review (Torraco, 2005, 2016) of current literature on higher education for refugees. Considering the quickly growing body of literature on the topic since 2016, the narrow time frame is meant to survey recent developments, existing studies, main trends, topics, and results in this newly growing field, followed by a discussion of research gaps and a synthesis of open research questions and methodical implications. The following leading questions structured the search and review process:

- How has the field of research on higher education for refugees changed along with growing public and academic interest?
- What are central topics, results and yet unaddressed research questions?
- How can further research build on and advance refugee and higher education studies?

During the last four years, I have been part of an empirical research project on the situation of refugee students in HEI and study preparation institutions in Germany. In order to address different research questions regarding the experiences of refugee students and organisational responses to their needs, my co-researchers and I conducted interviews and a focus group with refugee students, interviews with practitioners in counselling, administration, managerial and teaching positions and did a quantitative panel-study of international students with and without the experience of forced migration in German study preparation. My experiences with the field and resulting impressions of international studies on the topic did motivate this review.

2.2.1 Literature research and selection criteria

The literature discussed in this review was searched and selected through several steps. The first step was to conduct a database search in May 2019. In addition to the large interdisciplinary database Scopus, and the social science database GESIS, databases with an educational focus were searched: the Educational Resources Information Center

(ERIC), Education Source and peDOCS. Based on combinations of English and German keywords like “*refugee students*”, “*refugee*”, “*higher education*”, “*study preparation*”, “*Studium*”, “*Geflüchtete*”, the search was focussed on peer-reviewed articles that had been published in or after 2016. Table 1 provides an overview of all keyword combinations. The decision to search English and German keywords was mainly based on the assumption that most international publications would be in English. Thus, it could be expected that English keywords would cover an extensive part of international scholarship. Further, first results showed that the three main regional foci of international research on higher education for refugees were English- and German-speaking countries (Australia, Germany and the USA). Therefore, the search was extended to the German databases GESIS and peDOCS and German keywords were included.

Table 1: *Search Keywords*

Keyword Combinations		
Refugee(s)	&	Higher education
Forced migration		Tertiary education
Asylum seeker(s)		Postsecondary education
Refugee student(s)		College
		Preparatory colleges
		Preparatory classes
		Preparatory courses
		College preparation
		Study preparation
Geflüchtete	&	Studium
Flüchtlinge		Hochschule
Asylsuchende		Studienvorbereitung
		Vorbereitungskurse
		Studienkollegs
		Hochschulzugang

The main limitation concerning literature research and selection was the lack of funding. Thus, the final selection was partly determined by institutional or free access to databases and papers. Another aspect was the limitation to English and German keywords. Even though it seems fair to assume that English keywords provide a broad overview of the field considering the lack of publications from e.g. South American contexts, it would make sense for further investigations to add keywords in different languages. In this case, my language skills prevented further extension of the included languages. Some journals ask authors to provide additional English keywords for publications in other languages. Thus,

it could have been possible to find articles in other languages. However, I did not exclude any search results based on their language.

The second step was to conduct a similar search through additional databases, including Academia.edu, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. Due to filter settings, this search was not limited to peer-reviewed articles, but it could be assumed that the search could provide additional results. In total, the first two steps produced 1,154 results. Further, I included additional papers and chapters based on my experience with the field and references in the reviewed papers. During the writing process, I continued to update the search and to include literature that was newly published until December of 2019. A final database search was conducted in January 2020.

After student assistants had listed all results and sorted out doubles, I carefully went through the research results and excluded research on other, at the most tangentially related, topics. This exemplarily concerned papers on the political mindset of teenagers (Abs & Hahn-Laudenberg, 2017), on a variety of migration-related topics such as religion (Hansen, Jackson & Ryder, 2018), attitudes towards immigrants (Adamczyk, 2016), research methodology (Kaukko et al., 2017) and finally a large amount of studies on healthcare and mental health (e.g. Salami, Salma & Hegadoren, 2019), with the exception of studies with a focus on mental health or wellbeing in connection to higher education. I excluded all work on early childhood and school education (Massing, 2018) and on other forms of adult education (Käpplinger, 2018). Finally, I excluded literature reviews on higher education for refugees (Berg et al., 2018; Mangan & Winter, 2017; Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Reinhardt, 2018).

In order to follow general developments as comprehensively as possible (Steward, 2004, p. 496), I included empirical studies, as well as conceptual and descriptive publications. I followed Denney and Tewksbury's (2013) suggestion that the "two most appropriate sources are academic journal articles and academic books" (p. 227). It should be noted that policy documents, policy briefs, and blog posts often include evidence-based insights and project reports include research that will later be published in journals or books. However, in order to narrow down the pool of papers, I focussed on work that had been published in journals or in books that had been released by a publisher⁴.

⁴ I would, however, like to mention the following project reports that provide interesting insights into the topic: Fourier et al. (2017; 2018) provide statistical overviews of federally funded study preparation projects for refugees in Germany. Also focussing on Germany, Beigang, von Blumenthal, & Lambert (2018) have conducted a quantitative analysis of the responsiveness of German higher education institutions after the influx of refugee applications in 2015 and 2016. Finally, Yildiz (2019) provides a collection of chapters on policy and institutional responses in several European countries.

For papers to be included in this review, they had to meet the following selection criteria: a) They had been published in an academic journal (including journals that target practitioners) or they appeared in an edited volume or as a monograph with a publisher. b) They had to focus on study preparations or higher education for refugees and asylum seekers. In order to be as comprehensive as possible, this category was meant to be broad and included all papers with a higher education focus. This selection was based on the publications' abstracts. Finally, as no funding was available, I needed to c) be able to access to full paper. I used [two libraries] and contacted the authors of inaccessible papers directly.

Finally, 103 journal articles, chapters, and books were accessible and thus included in this review. They will henceforth be referred to as 'papers'. *Table 2* provides an overview of the reviewed literature. Additionally, all reviewed papers are marked with an asterisk in the reference list.

Table 2: *Overview of Reviewed Literature*

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Abamosa, J. Y.; Torbjørnsen Hilt, L. & Westrheim, K.	2019	Norway	Policy Analysis, Social Inclusion
Abdo, D. & Craven, K:	2018	USA	Every Campus a Refugee Program; Resettlement
Abdurazak, L. F.; Mawdieh, R. S.; Karam, A. A.; Aljaafreh, A. Y. & Al-Azzaw, M. E	2019	Jordan	Refugee Camp, Challenges
Akbasli, S. & Mavi, D.	2019	Turkey	Challenges
Al-Rousan, T.; Fredricks, K.; Chaudhury, S.; Albezreh, S.; Alhokair, A. & Nelson, B. D.	2018	Jordan	Well-Being, Peacebuilding

References

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Anderson, T.	2019	Canada	Media representation, International and Refugee Students
Atesok, Z.O.; Komsuogly, A. & Ozer, Y.Y.	2019	Turkey	Access challenges, Institutional policies and practices
Avery, H. & Said, S.	2017	Lebanon	Radicalisation, Peacebuilding, Socioeconomic Development
Bacher, J.; Fiorioli, E.; Moosbrugger, R.; Nnebedum, C.; Prandner, D. & Shovakara, N.	2019	Austria	Program Evaluation, Integration Theories, MORE initiative
Bajwa, J. K.; Couto, S.; Kidd, S.; Markoulakis, R.; Abai, M. & McKenzie, K.	2017	Canada	Challenges, Experiences and Expectations
Bajwa, J.K.; Abai, M.; Kidd, S.; Couto, S.; Dibavar, A. & McKenzie, K.	2018	Canada	Intersectional Challenges, Development of Support Structures
Bajwa, J.K.; Abai, M.; Couto, S.; Kidd, S.; Dibavar, A. & McKenzie, K.	2019	Canada	Psychological Capital, Life Satisfaction
Baker, S.; Ramsay, G.; Irwin, E. & Miles, L.	2017	Australia	Support, Counselling, Inclusivity

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Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Baker, S.; Irwin, E. & Freeman, H.	2019	Australia	Challenges, Time, Temporality, Timespaces
Baker, S. & Irwin, E.	2019	Australia	HE Transition Challenges, Institutional Expectations, Stuck Places
Baker, S.; Irwin, E.; Taiwo, M.; Singh, S.; Gower, S.; Dantas, J.	2019	n/a (Methodological Paper)	Methodology
Bellino, M.J. & Hure, M.	2018	Kenya	Refugee Camp, Developing Support Structures
Berg, J.	2018	Germany	Intersectional Challenges, Development of Support Structures
Berg, J.; Grüttner, M. & Schröder, S.	2019a	n/a (Methodological Paper)	Methodology, Framework for Methodological Approaches
Berg, J.; Grüttner, M. & Schröder, S.	2019b	n/a (Methodological Paper)	Interviews with Refugee Students, Methodology and Methods of Research with Refugees

References

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Berg, J., Schröder, S. & Grüttner, M.	2019	Germany	Study Preparation
Bouchara, A.	2019	Germany	Challenges, Social Networks
Brown, B.G.; Chaudhari, L.S.; Curtis, E.K. & Schulz, L.	2018	India	Refugee Camp, Global Service-Learning, Development of Support Structures
Brown, S.; Saint, M. & Russell, C.	2017	Ruanda	Refugee Camp, Information and Communication Network
Brunton, J.; Brown, M.; Costello, E.; Farrell, O. & Mahon, C.	2017	n/a (Online education)	Online Education, MOOCs, Digital Readiness Tools
Crea, T. M.	2016	Malawi, Kenya and Jordan	Refugee Camp, Development, International Education
Crea, T. M. & Sparnon, N.	2017	Malawi, Kenya and Jordan/ Online Education	Refugee Camp, Digital Capital, Distant Education
Dahya, N. & Dryden-Peterson, S.	2017	Kenya, Nairobi, Canada	Refugee Camp, Online Social Networks, Gender
Détourbe, M.-A. & Goastellec, G.	2018	Germany and England	Social stratification, Access to Higher

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Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
			Education, High Participation Systems
Dunwoodie, K.; Kaukko, M.; Wilkinson, J.; Reimer, K. & Webb, S.	2020	Australia	Competing discourses on needs of refugee students, Recognition
Erdogan A. & Erdogan, M.M.	2018	Turkey	Adaptation, Academic and Social Profile, Challenges, Potential
Ergin, H.	2016	Turkey	Perspective of Turkish Students on Refugee Students
Ertong Attar, G. & Küçükşen, D.	2019	Turkey	Prejudice, Belonging
Fleay, C.; Mumtaz, G.; Vakili, M.; Hartley, L.; Offord, B.; Macfarlane, C. & Sayer, R.	2019	Australia	Enabling Access, Collective Approach
Fook, J.	2017	n/a (Conceptual Paper)	Conceptual Paper, Equity
Grüttner, M.; Schröder, S.; Berg, J.; Otto, C.	2018	Germany	Agency, Capabilities, Aspirations, Challenges, Support
Grüttner, M.	2019	Germany	Social Exclusion and Inclusion, Psychological Wellbeing, Belonging, Resilience, Study Preparation

References

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Halkic, B. & Arnold, P.	2019	n/a (Online education)	Online Education, MOOC, Challenges, Support
Hartley, L.; Baker, S.; Fleay, C. & Burke, R.	2019	Australia	Access experiences, Challenges, Support Implications
Harvey, A. & Mallman, M.	2019	Australia	Cultural Capital, Student Diversity, Equity
Hirsch, A. & Maylea, C.	2016	Australia	Access Challenges, Asylum Policy
Iwers-Stelljes, T.; Bosse, E. & Heudorfer, A.	2016	Germany	Development of Support Structures, Organisational Development
Jack, O.; Chase, E. & Warwick, I.	2019	UK	Psychological Well-Being, Health-Promoting Universities
Jungblut, J.; Vukasovic, M. & Steinhardt, I.	2018	Germany and Belgium	Access, Policy
Karipek, Y.Z.	2017	Turkey	Acculturation, Integration, Challenges
Klaus, S.	2020	Germany	Refugee and Student Identity, Ambivalent Biographical Constructs

Integrative Literature Review

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Kong, E.-H.; Harmsworth, S.; Rajaeian, M.M.; Parkes, G.; Bishop, S.; AlMansouri, B. & Lawrence, J.	2016	Australia	University Transition Challenges, Equity
Kong, E.-H.; Lim, K.-C. & Yu, S.	2019	South Korea	Nursing Students, Challenges, Policy Implications
Kontowski, D. & Leitsberger, M.	2018	Poland and Austria	Hospitality, Support, Institutional Readiness, Capabilities and Public Role
Kreimer, A. & Boenigk, S.	2019	Germany	Cross-Sector Support, Access
Lee, M.W.; Han, M.-S. & Hyun, E.R.	2016	South Korea	Language Practices, Neoliberalism
Lee, R.	2018	USA	Education effect of parents' Visa- Categories
Lenette, C.	2016	Australia	Conceptual, Rationales to support refugee students
Lenette, C.; Baker, S. & Hirsch, A.	2019	Australia	Systemic Policy Barriers, Neoliberal Settlement, Language Policies, Challenges

References

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Luu, D. H. & Blanco, G. L.	2019	USA	Federal Policy Discourse, Access
Marcu, S.	2018	Spain	Challenges, Institutional Support, Education for Sustainability
Maringe, F.; Ojo, E. & Chiramba, O.	2017	South Africa	Policy-Practice Disjunctures, higher education Policy Framework
Molla, T.	2019	Australia	Challenges, Resilience
Muñoz, J. C.; Colucci, E. & Smidt, H.	2018	n/a (Online education)	Online Education, Open Education, Learning Purposes
Mupenzi, A.	2018	Australia	Educational resilience, Experiences
Naylor, R.; Terry, L.; Rizzo, A.; Nguyen, N. & Mifsud, N.	2019	Australia	Structural Inequality
Nayton, C.; Meek, G. & Foletta, R.	2019	Australia	NGO-Practitioner Perspective, Language Education, Lifelong Learning
R Student.; Kendall, K. & Day, L.	2017	UK	Collaborative Auto- Ethnography
Park, E.S.	2019	South Korea	Language Requirements,

Integrative Literature Review

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
			Language Learning, Support Programs
Perry, K. H. & Mallozzi, C. A.	2017	USA	Worldview, Discourse Analysis
Phan, T.A.	2018	USA	Implications for Support at Community Colleges
Rasheed, R.A. & Munoz, A.	2016	Iraq	Peacebuilding, Peace- Education
Reimer, K.; Kaukko, M.; Dunwoodie, K.; Wilkinson, J. & Webb, S.	2019	n/a (Methodological Paper)	Methodology, Head, Heart, Hands and Feet Approach
Reinhardt, F.; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, O.; Deribo, T.; Happ, R. & Nell-Müller, S.	2018	n/a (Online education)	Online Education, MOOCs, Integration Approaches, Diversity
Rowe, N.; Martin, R.; Knox, S. & Mabingo, A.	2016	USA	Academic Acculturation, Inclusion, Citizenship
Schammann, H. & Younso, C.	2017	Germany	Development of Support Structures, Challenges
Schammann, H. & Younso, C.	2016	Germany	Emerging Institutional Support for Refugee Students in Germany, Implications

References

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Schneider, L.	2018	Germany	Access, Aspirations, Challenges
Schröder, S., Grüttner, M. & Berg, J.	2019	Germany	Study Preparation, Access, Life-Wide (Language) Learning, Interpretative Patterns
Shapiro, S.	2018	USA	Familial Capital, Agency, Support, College Transitions
Sheikh, M.; Koc, Y. & Anderson, J.R.	2019	Australia	Access barriers, challenges
Sheridan, V.	2016	USA	1956 Revolution, Support and Surveillance, Access to higher education in the 1950s, Historical
Sontag, K.	2018	Switzerland	Access
Sontag, K.	2019	Germany, France, and Switzerland	Access, Challenges, Highly Skilled Refugees
Steinhilber, A.	2019	Jordan	Evaluation of psychosocial support, Scholarship Programme
Stevenson, J. and Baker, S.	2018	UK and Australia	Discourse, Challenges, Support, Practice

Integrative Literature Review

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Streitwieser, B.	2019	n/a (Conceptual Paper)	Conceptual, Internationalisation, International Student Mobility
Streitwieser, B.; Miller-Idriss, C. & deWit, H.	2017	Europe	Challenges, Support, Responses, Internationalisation
Streitwieser, B.; Brueck, L.; Moody, R. & Taylor, M.	2017	Germany	Potential, Challenges, Support
Streitwieser, B. & Brück, L.	2018	Germany	Cultural, Political and Economic Dynamics, Support, Motivations
Streitwieser, B.; Loo, B.; Ohorodnik, M. & Jeong, J.	2019	Europe and North America	Integration, Support, Policies
Streitwieser, B.; Schmidt, M.A.; Brück, L. & Gläser, K.M.	2018	Germany	Support
Streitwieser, B.; Schmidt, M.A.; Gläser, K.M. & Brück, L.	2018	Germany	Challenges, Support
Tamrat, W. & Habtemariam, S.D.	2019	Ethiopia	Challenges, Private Education
Theuerl, M.	2016	Germany	Transcultural Space, Support
Toker, H.	2019	Norway	Acknowledgement of foreign Documents, higher education Policies

References

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Tuliao, M.D.; Hatch, D.K. & Torraco, R.J.	2017	USA	Culturally-Responsive Instruction, Community Colleges, Support
Tzoraki, O.	2019	Greece	Responses, Support
Unangst, L, & Streitwieser, B.	2018	Germany	Inclusive Practices, Support Structures, Support Rationales
Unangst, L.	2019	Germany	Policy Implications
Unger-Ullmann, D.	2017	Austria	Language Learning, Support
Vickers, M.; McCarthy, F. & Zammit, K.	2017	Australia	Peer-Mentoring, Intercultural Understanding, Support
Villegas, P.E. and Aberman, T.	2019	Canada	Access Challenges, Racialisation, Precarious Status
Vue, R.	2019	USA	Challenges, Trauma, Resilience, Pedagogies of Remembrance
Webb, S.; Dunwoodie, K. & Wilkinson, J.	2019	Australia	Equity Frames, Organisational Theory, Support
White, J.	2017	Australia	Conceptional, Educational Exclusion, National Identity

Author(s)	Year	Country of Research	Themes
Witthaus, G.	2018	Germany	Online Education, MOOCS, Community of Inquiry, Developmental Evaluation
Yesufu, L. & Alajlani, S.	2019	Jordan	Social Innovation, Zaatari Refugee Camp
Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, O.; Happ, R.; Nell-Müller, S.; Deribo, T.; Reinhardt, F. & Toepper, M.	2018	n/a (Online education)	Online Education, MOOCs, Study Success

2.2.2 Review

After the literature-selection, all papers were summarised in order to provide a first overview of the material. This step was crucially supported by a group of students as well as a fellow researcher in the field. The summaries were done using a template I prepared with sections for the topic, research question, localisation, relevance, methods, theoretical framework, and central findings of each paper. All summaries contain brief notes and selected quotations for all applicable sections. They provided a first overview and orientation for further steps. The next step was to familiarise myself with all the papers and to create a synoptic table to sort them according to their topics, methods, sample, and regional focus. This “descriptive evaluation of each study” (Wright, Brand, Dunn, & Spindler, 2007, p. 26) allowed for a generalised description and comparison of the literature under review. Instead of applying a conceptual framework to add a new angle to an established field of study, I decided to survey the main characteristics and issues of this newly emerging field in order to identify implications for further research. The topics and central results that are presented in this review had not been pre-selected, but their identification was grounded on reviewing the discussed papers. Throughout the review process, I discussed the papers’ results and quality with students and fellow researchers.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Descriptive overview

In order to provide an overview of recent literature on higher education for refugees, all included papers were sorted into descriptive categories, including their publication date, the localisation of the study, empirical method, sample, and main topics. *Table 3* provides an overview of publication dates, which shows that there has been a notable increase in international publications since 2016.

Table 3: *Number of Publications per Year*

Year of Publication	Number of Publications
2016	12
2017	19
2018	28
2019	43
2020 (available online in 2019)	2

A comparison to previous literature reviews emphasises this impression: Ramsay and Baker's (2019) discussion of 46 papers that were published between 1999 and early 2018 included 30 papers that had been published between 1999 and 2015, and 16 after that. Berg et al. (2018) reviewed 34 empirical studies that had been published between 1990 and early 2018. Seventeen of them had been published between 1990 and 2015, and 17 more after that.

When describing the relevance of the topic, many papers refer to recent developments such as the globally increasing number of displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers (R Student, Kendall, & Day, 2017), especially after the war in Syria, and also to an increase in asylum seekers and refugees with high educational aspirations. It can

only be assumed that this might also have led to the availability of new research funds and greater interest in the topic by journal editors and book publishers.

International research before 2016 mostly focussed on English-speaking countries, primarily Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA (Berg et al., 2018). *Table 4* provides an overview of the regional foci of the papers that are discussed in this review:

Table 4: *Regional Foci*

Country	Number of Publications
Germany	21
Australia	19
USA	10
Turkey	6
Canada	5
Jordan	4
Norway	2
South Korea	3
UK	2
Austria	2
Ethiopia	1
Greece	1

References

Country	Number of Publications
India	1
Kenya	1
Lebanon	1
Ruanda	1
South Africa	1
Spain	1
Switzerland	1
Multiple Countries	11 (5 of them multiple European countries)

While Australia and the USA are still among the three countries with the most academic inquiry and output on higher education for refugees, the general regional focus has shifted. Before 2016, hardly any research had been conducted on the situation of refugees in Germany, for example. This has rapidly changed, now making Germany the object of the most country-specific studies in this review. This development seems to be closely related to the war in Syria, which caused a significant influx of new asylum applications in Germany and the country's rapid development of structural funding for refugees. Parallel to that development, publication numbers indicate an increase of academic interest in refugee education in neighbouring countries to Syria, including Turkey and Jordan, and European multi-country studies.

Mainly, the reviewed publications focus on Europe, Australia, and North America (Canada and the USA). A few papers, however, also take Asian and African countries into account. Strikingly, the search produced no papers investigating the situation of refugee

students in either South or Central American countries. It must also be noted that surely the regional focus of studies is influenced by the limitation of using only English and German keywords for my search. Of all included publications, eight were published in the German language. Two of them are methodological, while five focus on Germany and one on Austria.

Of all 104 papers included in this integrative review, 80 present results of empirical studies. Of those, the large majority conducted qualitative studies (59). Ten studies used mixed methods, and nine were based on quantitative or standardised research designs. Often, the studies presented relatively small samples or case studies of individual support programmes, including very small quantitative sample sizes. The commonness of qualitative and small-sample studies could have various reasons. First, considering the rather small body of previous research, it stands to reason that research projects either focus on or start with explorative studies to gather first empirical evidence of the field. Second, programmes for refugee students are often HEO-specific and not part of a coordinated national or even supra-national approach. Thus, even if all participants of a specific programme are included, the sample size might still be limited. Third, identifying and reaching the target group outside of specific support programmes poses serious difficulties. Finally, little quantitative information is available for further analysis, because refugees are usually neither identifiable in survey-studies, nor do HEOs provide specific information on them. As Streitwieser and Brück (2018) have pointed for the German context, no data is collected on the legal status of enrolled students.

I was unable to classify the methods of two empirical studies as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods due to their contradictory or partial methods sections. Seven papers are categorised as conceptual, which I understand as drawing on or developing a theoretical framework to discuss the topic (Callahan, 2010). Further, seven papers are categorised as desk research. They provided policy overviews or project-descriptions with no mentioning or description of methods. Another seven papers presented descriptions and discussions of individual support programmes. Finally, four papers introduced methodological implications or frameworks for research on and with refugee students.

The leading topics of most papers I reviewed were the situation and experiences of refugee students as well as institutional contexts with a strong focus on challenges and support for (prospective) refugee students. They will be presented in more detail in the next sections. Eight of the papers discussed higher education in refugee camps, and six papers focussed on online education. Finally, it should be noted that most of the research has taken

the perspective of refugees and asylum seekers into account. Of the 80 empirical studies, 60 either solely focussed on (38) or included the perspective of or data on asylum seekers and refugees in a mixed sample (22). This can be related to refugee studies' strong demand to take first-hand experiences into account (Berg, Grüttner, Schröder, 2019a).

2.3.2 The methodology of research with refugee students

A majority of the empirical studies have investigated the perspectives and experiences of (prospective) refugee students. They are based on different approaches to research with refugees. Four publications specifically focussed on the methodology of research with refugee students (Baker, Irwin, Taiwo, Singh, Gower, & Dantas, 2019; Berg, Grüttner, & Schröder, 2019a, 2019b; Reimer, Kaukko, Dunwoodie, Wilkinson, & Webb, 2019). Among them is Berg et al.s' (2019a) introduction of a classification of empirical approaches. Based on a review of methodological literature, the authors distinguished ethical, emancipatory-participative, and research-pragmatic approaches. Following this framework, this section gives a brief overview of methodological approaches to research with refugee students. It should be mentioned that the conceptual framework is based on how the target group is reflected, and what outcomes and benefits are expected from the research project. Thus, research-pragmatic approaches are not to be understood as unethical, but differ in the way how empirical decisions are made – or rather, how they are described in their method sections.

First, *ethical approaches* emphasize the potential vulnerability of and aim to protect them from any harm that could result from the research process (Berg et al., 2019b, p. 3). Reimer et al. (2019) stated that “[r]esearchers have raised numerous aspects unique to participants from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds that must be noted when designing and conducting research” (p. 195). In order to do that, researchers must carefully consider “how, at the very least, to do no harm with this particular group of participants” (Reimer et al., 2019, p. 193). On the one hand, this includes awareness of and strategies to not reinforce experienced trauma (Bajwa, et al., 2018, p. 116), and on the other hand, it means increased awareness for “[p]ower dynamics and status hierarchies” (Baker et al., 2019a, p. 17). Such research can give refugees the space to share their experiences, tell their own stories and develop their own position (Hartley et al., 2019, p. 6; Mupenzi, 2018, p. 131).

The first step toward ethical research with refugees is to follow procedural ethics, which were indeed acknowledged to offer a certain basic guideline (Reimer et al., 2019,

p. 195). However, they were also criticised as an additional bureaucratic procedure that can lead to researchers focussing more on writing a report that will fit the committee's expectations than on carefully considering their research practices (Stevenson & Baker, 2018, 114f.). In case the formal procedure is not well-attuned with the specific target group, blindly following it could even lead to increased ethical issues (Reimer et al., 2019, p. 196), as Baker et al. (2019a) have shown for the example of parental consent. In their study, due to the need for parental consent forms, "an undue burden was placed on high school students who were required to explain, and sometimes translate documents, before parents could sign them." (Baker et al., 2019a, p. 18). Therefore, they argued that it was important to not only follow the logic of ethical guidelines but to interpret and apply them practically based on target group reflection as well as empathy (Reimer et al., 2019) throughout the entire research process (Baker et al., 2019a). Beyond the instructions of procedural ethics, a lack of attention for and awareness of the participants is imperative. This includes the reflection of their potential needs, but also the consideration of possible risks that could emerge for them. Otherwise, inattentive researchers risk to reproduce social exclusion and/or repressive structures.

Second, *emancipatory-participative approaches* have a similar perception of their target group but aim to actively include them in the development and conduct of research (Berg et al., 2019b, p. 3). Research designs in this category take measures to include refugees throughout several stages of the research process, beyond merely data collection. This can mean the selection of research topics and foci (R. Student et al., 2017) or offering co-authorship after cooperation throughout the research-process (Baker et al., 2017, 5f.). Participatory research thus depends on the interest and availability of members of the target group to participate extensively. Furthermore, the application of a critical lens, and sufficient resources, including adequate funding and time, are crucial factors for the realisation of participatory research projects. Finally, inequalities between researchers and participants, for example regarding their compensation or their scopes of action, and inequalities within the target group that can lead to unbalanced representations or even exclusions, need to be carefully considered (Berg et al., 2019b, p. 4).

Reimer et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of an activist approach while conducting research with refugees: researchers should "identify what needs to be done to move forward and promote human well-being" (p. 200). Generally, ethical approaches would more likely do that by creating awareness and voicing policy implications, which many of the reviewed studies do. In comparison, the objectives of emancipatory-

participative approaches include a direct beneficial influence on members of the target group. This can mean that researchers support their participants individually or create offers for a number of members of their target group.

Third, *research-pragmatic approaches* mainly reflect on their target group in order to find answers for methodological and methodical questions that might result for their study design (Berg et al., 2019a, 2019b). Examples from the reviewed studies include the consideration of language barriers (Berg et al., 2019b; Hirsch & Maylea, 2016), trauma-related difficulties in responding to research-questions (Akbasli & Mavi, 2019, p. 5), and cultural implications (Crea, 2016, p. 14). Even though the topics are similar to ethical considerations, research-pragmatic approaches mainly consider them in relation to their practical implications: they focus on possible consequences of the target group's characteristics for the research project. Ethical approaches, on the other hand, rather consider the research project's consequences for their target group.

2.3.3 The relevance of support for refugee students

“Academia, like freedom, is indivisible. It is enriched by diversity, and so long as some are excluded, all are restricted. How citizenship in the academic space is perceived and experienced is, therefore, a complex and urgent political concern” (Rowe, Martin, Knox, & Mabingo, 2016, p. 68).

Many authors advocated that there is a moral and social obligation to provide higher education opportunities for refugees (Abamosa, Hilt, & Westrheim, 2019, p. 13; Lenette, 2016) and referred to education as a Human Right (Naylor, Terry, Rizzo, Nguyen, & Mifsud, 2019). Referring to political, institutional, and individual motivations to support refugee students and their own understanding of the relevance of the topic, the reviewed papers expected a number of benefits from providing this support on the social and institutional level, as well as for individual refugees.

On a social level, higher education was a crucial enabler for the integration of refugees (Marcu, 2018, p. 18). Further, Rasheed & Munoz referred to it as a method of “peacebuilding” (2016, p. 172), and Avery & Said (2017) argued that it helped preventing radicalisation. In the long term, educated refugees were understood to be important actors “to support their communities in exile and contribute to the future development of their home countries” (Avery & Said, 2017, p. 107). Another notable aspect related to social integration is labour market participation, which was repeatedly emphasised as an important outcome of higher education (Abamosa et al., 2019, p. 4; Marcu, 2018, p. 2;

Tuliao, Hatch, & Torracco, 2017, p. 23). "Successful higher education outcomes [are expected to] increase refugees' potential to contribute to a country's socio-economic advancement and can thus prevent further marginalisation" (Lenette, 2016, p. 2). The strong political, institutional, and academic focus on labour market outcomes was criticised to "sideline the social justice and human potential aspects regarding the social inclusion of refugees into higher education" (Abamosa et al., 2019, 2) and "undermines other important settlement outcomes including social integration, trauma recovery, and understanding the sociocultural context" (Lenette et al., 2019, p. 95).

On an institutional level, refugees were sometimes understood to support HEIs' internationalisation (Abamosa et al., 2019; Berg, 2018; Streitwieser, 2019) and enrich their cultural diversity (Theuerl, 2016, p. 178; Unger-Ullmann, 2017, p. 5). This effect was described as beneficial for domestic students, especially those who are acting as mentors (Vickers, McCarthy, & Zammit, 2017, p. 198). Investigating the anticipated and experienced benefits of supporting refugee students might on the one hand allow a perspective that is less deficit-oriented than most investigations of challenges for refugee students. However, on the other hand, the criticism of a labour market focus that is mentioned above could also apply to a focus on benefits for domestic students. In closer orientation on the needs of refugee students, newly implemented support programmes were understood to provide a chance for HEIs to "re-assess the ways in which students can engage and how they can give value to the skills brought by the prospective students" (Sontag, 2018, p. 542).

On an individual level, higher education was described to empower refugees (Crea, 2016, p. 19) and support their sense of belonging as well as their psychological wellbeing (Al-Rousan et al., 2018; Bajwa et al., 2019; Grüttner, 2019) and self-esteem (Bajwa et al., 2018, p. 120) and as a way to help them overcome trauma (Maringe, Ojo, & Chiramba, 2017). Finally, participation in higher education programmes can be seen as "an act of resistance itself" (Villegas & Aberman, 2019, p. 79), in order to overcome and defy stereotypes and negative ascriptions (Harvey & Mallman, 2019, 663f.).

The studies that investigated the perspective of refugee students found them to be highly motivated to participate in higher education. They were often described as expecting the improvement of their situation (Schneider, 2018) and to see higher education as a facilitator for positive individual development as well as a chance to socially participate and give back to their communities (Crea, 2016, p. 19) or repay the support they received in their host country (Hirsch & Maylea, 2016, p. 23). Bellino and Hure (2018, p. 48)

described a higher education programme within a refugee camp, which was built based on the initiative and active participation of refugees. They found refugees to desire to be a role model, to support younger generations, and to facilitate hope. On the one hand, refugees' expectations for higher education were described to help them integrate into and participate in the new country (Kong, Harmsworth, Rajaeian, Parkes, Bishop, AlMansouri, & Lawrence, 2016, p. 192; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Happ, Nell-Müller, Deribo, Reinhardt, & Toepper, 2018, p. 170); among other factors based on the benefits of language skills and higher education degrees in the labour market (Crea & Sparnon, 2017, p. 12; Park, 2019, p. 10). On the other hand, Karipek (2017) mentioned motivations among Syrian students to return and rebuild their home country while “bring[ing] back a range of knowledge and experience” (p. 127).

Overall, scholars understood higher education to potentially "yield better settlement outcomes for refugees to increase social cohesion and, more importantly, help redress some of the personal and social disadvantages and the detrimental public discourse" (Lenette, 2016, p. 2). Higher education could create hope and can be the “foundation of building a new life in the host country” (Grüttner et al., 2018, p. 117). By providing trustful environments and spaces for exchange (Villegas & Aberman, 2019, p. 77) and thereby “humanising” (Fleay, Abbas, Mumtaz, Vakili, Nasrullah, Hartley, Offord et al., 2019, p. 187) refugees, successful projects could support refugees in building agency, developing critical thinking, and reflecting on their own position, thereby counteracting social exclusion and marginalisation (Avery & Said, 2017; Bajwa et al., 2018; Fleay et al., 2019; Lenette, 2016). This was done in most exemplary fashion by previous refugee students who act as role models in their communities (Lenette, 2016).

2.3.4 Challenges for refugee students

Among the main research interests of the reviewed studies were the numerous challenges refugees face in accessing and obtaining higher education. Some of those challenges are similar to those most international students must deal with; others are specifically increased or added by the circumstances of the migration of refugee students (Berg, 2018). In this section, I give an overview of those multifaceted and often interrelated challenges (Atesok et al., 2019, p. 133; Kong et al., 2016, p. 190; Sontag, 2019, p. 76).

The main challenges that were identified throughout the papers included language proficiency, the accessibility of information, finances (AbduRazak et al., 2019, p. 176; Baker et al., 2017; Sheikh et al., 2019, p. 15), housing in stressful environments and/or

remote areas (Akbasli & Mavi, 2019; Schammann & Younso, 2017, p. 13), and issues of mental health. Further, family obligations (Perry & Mallozzi, 2017, p. 511), social isolation, discrimination, acculturation in a new learning environment, legal issues, and disrupted educational biographies, as well as impeding institutional settings, were described to inhibit refugees' access to and success in higher education. Some authors also argued that cultural differences slowed down, and cultural similarities to host countries could increase, social and academic integration (Karipek, 2017, p. 125; Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2019, p. 134). In this context, gendered expectations can cause additional hurdles, especially for women (Crea & Sparnon, 2017, p. 17; Perry & Mallozzi, 2017, p. 496).

One of the central challenges that was identified throughout the papers is missing linguistic capital, which usually refers to expert knowledge of the English language and the receiving country's main language. A lack of documented language proficiency results in formal difficulties in accessing study preparation as well as higher education programmes (Grüttner et al., 2018; Unangst & Streitwieser, 2018). Further, familiarity with the *lingua franca* and its cultural implications is an important facilitator of successful participation in higher education and, prospectively, the labour market (Akbasli & Mavi, 2019, p. 10; Park, 2019). Harvey and Mallman (2019) argued that even though multilingualism could be considered a strength, they rather found it to increase family obligations such as necessary translations. The participants in their study at Australian universities did not view their multilingualism as a strength at university and were also discriminated against based on their foreign accents.

Several challenges relate to the mental health and wellbeing of refugee students. They derive from pre- as well as post-migration phases (Jack, Chase, & Warwick, 2019, p. 62) as well as unclear prospects (Crea, 2016, p. 19) and can exemplarily result in a lack of stability, increased vulnerability, and inhibited academic performance (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2018, p. 275; Sheikh et al., 2019, 9; 14). Mental health issues and the various and time-consuming challenges inhibiting quick integration and participation in their host countries were described to create a feeling of lost time (Baker, Irwin, & Freeman, 2019b, p. 11), which could thus frustrate and potentially demoralise refugee. Further, the experience of non-acknowledgement of previous knowledge and education (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Jack et al., 2019; Sheikh et al., 2019) on the one hand and social isolation and discrimination on the other hand (Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Molla, 2019; Villegas & Aberman, 2019) can cause feelings of low self-esteem (Park, 2019, p. 7; Tamrat &

Habtemariam, 2019, p. 134). Based on quantitative survey data, Grüttner (2019) has shown that:

“mechanisms of social exclusion can hamper learning and study preparation success and thereby threaten the academic careers of international students and integration strategies of refugee students. Personal resources of resilience like resilient coping can strengthen feelings of belonging against the backdrop of perceived xenophobia” (p. 42).

Finally, institutional settings add to refugees’ challenges in entering and obtaining higher education in four ways:

First, challenges in entering and obtaining higher education are enhanced by unclear or missing higher education policy for refugees. This places the responsibility on individual institutions (Villegas & Aberman, 2019, p. 73) and creates a confusing variety of individual approaches. Further, in some cases, refugee policies were “focused primarily on workforce development and career training, rather than on the academic track of post-secondary education” (Luu & Blanco, 2019, p. 9). Brown, Saint, & Russel (2017) have argued that “[s]ome host governments may resist the idea of educating refugee learners when their own population also needs higher education opportunities” (p. 9), which hints at a broader question of competition over resources and support.

Second, repressive asylum policies and the multi-sector entanglement of, for example, higher education, welfare, legal, and asylum policies create challenges for refugees because “these areas need to be taken into account simultaneously, but what is more challenging is that they are often not well in tune with one another” (Schammann & Younso, 2017; Sontag, 2019, p. 72). Klaus (2020) noted that this creates a situation in which refugee students are forced to create a self-description as individually highly motivated and achieving – and thus as different from ‘other’ refugees.

Based on her study of how migrants’ visa categories influence their children’s education in the USA, Lee’s (2018) study exemplarily has shown that visa categories can even have a further impact on the academic careers of second-generation migrants. Thus, Lee argued that “entry visas and selection by immigration policy act as forms of stratification” (p. 1579). Formal and legal challenges largely depend on the specifics of host countries and individual status (AbduRazak et al., 2019, p. 176; Atesok et al., 2019, p. 132). For Germany, Schammann and Younso (2017) described status-dependent issues such as inhibited mobility, issues with obtaining obligatory social insurances that students

have to hold before applying for higher education, or inhibited access to basic German courses for asylum seekers that are not (yet) granted refugee protection. Even though they could technically apply for higher education, those circumstances practically prevent asylum seekers from being able to do so. In the case of Australia, White (2017, p. 10) criticised that asylum seekers and refugees are purposefully disadvantaged and actively kept in a state of uncertainty about their legal status. This includes preventing them from developing the necessary skills, for example, by "deliberately limiting their exposure to English language (i.e., denying opportunities to attain proficiency)" (Lenette et al., 2019, p. 88). White (2017) stated that this could be seen "as a mechanism for making Australia less attractive to prospective refugees" (p. 7).

Third, refugees face challenges to meet formal access criteria when they decide to apply for higher education (Grüttner et al., 2018; Klaus, 2020, p. 29). The main issues in this context are meeting the language requirements (Unangst & Streitwieser, 2018) and the acknowledgement of previous education and formal access certificates in general, but specifically in cases where documents are missing or education has been interrupted (Berg, 2018). As Schröder, Grüttner, & Berg (2019, p. 79) have shown for the case of study preparation courses in Germany, interpretations of formal selection criteria and their outcomes are respectively transformed to fit higher education's meritocratic self-description. This self-description is challenged by remaining inequalities in higher education, or as White (2017) puts it: "The egalitarian myth doesn't apply to Aboriginal Australians, the Chinese on goldfields, or women and a long shadow of institutionalised racism was cast" (p. 3).

Finally, the unawareness or ignorance of HEIs toward refugees can result in unfitting institutional contexts. This includes the "[a]voidance of the notion of refugees" (Maringe et al., 2017, p. 6) and the "[a]bsence of a culture of care and support [in an] academic environment [that] is built around notions of the survival of the fittest" (ibid.). Institutional rules and regulations of university transition are based on assumptions about students, their cultural capital, and language proficiency (Park, 2019, p. 8), as well as their aspirations, linear life courses, and knowledge about academic practices and education systems (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Stevenson & Baker, 2018, 96f.). An example is HEIs' internationalisation policies, which were not created with refugee students in mind (Webb et al., 2019). The result is an institutional environment that does not consider and therefore does not or cannot adequately address the background, experiences, and needs of refugee students. The lack of considering refugees in educational policies and appropriate training

of HEI members might even result in the creation of additional challenges, such as admission offices unnecessarily considering legal status because of their own legal insecurity (Schammann & Younso, 2017) or misunderstood legal statuses (Villegas & Aberman, 2019, p. 75). Repeatedly, authors have argued that refugees experience difficulties in obtaining important information about available services (Jack et al., 2019, p. 62), but also about the higher education system in general (Atesok et al., 2019, 124f.; Berg, 2018), partly because the way information is communicated did not fit the needs of refugee students (Baker et al., 2017). Based on their study of a support programme in Canada, Bajwa, et al. (2017) found:

“that many survivors of torture and/or war face challenges in accessing appropriate professional supports and information to navigate educational pathways, and to make informed decisions about what type of post-secondary programs or career training to pursue. Given such a lack of resources, refugees often rely on word-of-mouth information, which may not always be trustworthy. Their dilemma is further complicated by the fact that refugees have diverse and unique informational needs, as their immigration statuses, prior credentials, and experiences, and specific financial situations all affect the type of information they require to pursue educational goals” (p. 62).

Baker and Irwin (2019) have criticised that the knowledge and experience of refugee students are not recognised as a strength, but they are expected to fit institutional expectations of the academy. This adds on to the challenges of navigating within a new educational setting, including new teaching and learning styles (Sheikh et al., 2019; Bouchara, 2019, p. 64; Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2019). For the case of North Korean students in South Korea, Park (2019) described how “they were not equipped with the knowledge and skills that South Korean students take for granted” (p. 8).

2.3.5 Institutional contexts

This section gives an overview of challenges institutions face when trying to support refugee students and of instruments of support that are used in programmes for refugees.

Challenges for Institutions. Even though research with members of HEIs, including students and staff, has found a generally robust motivation to support refugees, HEIs themselves face structural challenges when trying to provide such support. They often lack trained staff and have difficulties finding enough specialists (Maringe et al., 2017), such as

competent language teachers, instructors with intercultural training (Crea & Sparnon, 2017), or qualified providers of psychological support (Steinhilber, 2019), in order to address the complex needs of this diverse target group (Schröder et al., 2019, p. 72). Additionally, some papers described faculty members' insecurities about how to address refugees and simply to deal with practical questions (Schammann & Younso, 2017, p. 12). Those insecurities include the validity of documents (Toker, 2019) and adequate ways to address refugees. As Lenette (2016) commented about the case of Australia: "There are a number of initiatives aiming to facilitate refugees' access to university; however, there are no clear frameworks to assess the extent of, let alone address, the specific needs of refugee students" (p. 1).

This lack of frameworks and information can lead to misjudgements of the prospective target group or the provision of suitable support. As Unger-Ullmann (2017) has stated about an Austrian university, the aim of accepting a number of young prospective refugee students could not be met, because in most of the universities' language classes, participants were older than 20, and 58% were between 25 and 40 years old (p. 3). Other studies found high dropout rates (Kreimer & Boenigk, 2019) or little interest in programmes that did not include official degrees (Crea & Sparnon, 2017, p. 15; Schammann & Younso, 2017). Further, identifying refugee students can be an issue. That is the case in Germany, where data protection laws prevent HEIs from registering the legal status of their students after enrolment (Unangst, 2019).

The lack of information and guidelines is closely linked to the political framework and availability of policy solutions. Considering the situation in the USA, Luu and Blanco have stated that "[t]he perspective on refugees espoused by the Trump Administration is symptomatic of a larger discourse that vilifies and dehumanises refugees" (Luu & Blanco, 2019, p. 4). Political discourses and policy frameworks are of great importance to HEIs that aim to support refugee students because they determine the availability of official guidelines, the existence or absence of target group-specific policies (Abamosa et al., 2019, 4), and policy solutions or suggestions, for topics such as how to deal with the acknowledgement of documents and – last but not least – public funding. Especially public and non-profit HEIs have difficulty in fully funding their programmes, which makes public funding then such a crucial factor (Nayton, Meek, & Foletta, 2019).

However, HEIs have put together various offers for refugees. The next section will give an overview of different approaches and activities to support refugee students.

Instruments of Support. Depending on the national context, there are often various and sometimes complex pathways for refugees into higher education (for the case of Germany, see Schröder et al., 2019). Some refugees might be able to apply for it directly, but many also need “further preparation or additional support” (Villegas & Aberman, 2019, p. 77). There are various international and national initiatives that aim to prepare and support refugee students (Stevenson & Baker, 2018, 103f.; Streitwieser et al., 2019, p. 489), including the activities of preparatory colleges (Schröder et al., 2019) or NGOs (Nayton et al., 2019). This section gives an overview of different instruments of support. It should be mentioned that many of the initiatives are newly developing and have been described as constantly changing based on growing experience and evaluations (Iwers-Stelljes et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2019).

Most programmes and initiatives described in the literature provide offers that aim to support prospective refugee students in developing skills that are considered necessary in higher education, such as the primary language of the receiving country (Fleay et al., 2019; Lenette et al., 2019; Nayton et al., 2019; Schammann & Younso, 2017). A notable case is Park's (2019) description of language classes for North Korean refugees in South Korea. Even though they share their native language, refugees often need to heavily increase their English skills due to the importance of this second language in the South Korean education system and labour market. Further offers include academic propaedeutics, such as math courses and the training of software skills (Tzoraki, 2019, p. 8). In some cases, offers are solely available to refugees. In others, they are included in existing offers for international students, which is often positively discussed as a way of supporting, but not isolating, refugees (Grüttner et al., 2018; Unger-Ullmann, 2017).

In many cases, individual institutions decide on the eligibility of the applicant due to the documents they have provided. In order to simplify the process of validating foreign documents, several procedures have been tried or suggested. In the USA and Canada, for example, there are efforts by institutions to provide evaluations of credentials, such as that by the organisation World Education Services (Streitwieser et al., 2019). In Europe, on the other hand, there is the ongoing development of a “European Qualifications Passport” (Toker, 2019), which would provide a European-wide suggestion on the eligibility of an applicant’s documents. Some countries, such as Norway (Toker, 2019), have also created national policy-frameworks.

Also very common are offers for social integration. In some cases, they are described to be “customized to the specific needs and requirements of refugees”

(Streitwieser & Brück, 2018, p. 45). In other cases, previously existing offers were opened for refugee students. Mentoring and exchange with domestic and other international students are understood to be beneficial for all participants: In order to prepare their members, HEIs can also focus on “training the trainers” (Tzoraki 2019: 8) and providing “training and awareness in linguistic and cultural immersion” (Marcu 2018: 14). Some practitioners aim to design support programmes according to the anticipated social needs of refugee students, exemplarily by initiating trauma-sensitive offers (Nayton et al., 2019) or aiming at improved self-confidence (Bajwa et al., 2018) and “the development of life skills” (Steinhilber, 2019, p. 98). In some cases, refugees were among those initiating the programme (Bellino & Hure, 2018, p. 48; Fleay et al., 2019, p. 168).

As for many prospective students, information is both crucial for refugees and, sometimes, especially hard to come by. Therefore, providing valid and targetgroup-specific information and counselling is an important aspect of support programmes (Nayton et al., 2019; Tulião et al., 2017, p. 20). Another major concern is providing financial support. This can be based on “cost-sharing programs” (Bellino & Hure, 2018, p. 48), inclusion in public student funding, as it is described for Germany (Schamann & Younso, 2017, p. 13), and full scholarships (Fleay et al., 2019, p. 172; Hartley et al., 2019, p. 12; Webb et al., 2019), as well as “programs that promote financial self-sufficiency [such as] Individual Development Accounts” (Luu & Blanco, 2019, p. 9). Another issue that can often not be addressed by HEIs is housing. Nonetheless, some programmes offer support in that area or even campus housing (Abdo & Craven, 2018, p. 143). Some HEIs give refugees guest access to their classes. This is meant to provide insight into academic practices and language. However, Schamann & Younso (2017, p.14) have criticised this approach as not fitting refugees’ expectations and Klaus (2020, p. 136) described it as a quick solution with no serious endeavour to fully academically include refugee students. Further, structural support often includes access to infrastructure, such as Wi-Fi or libraries, which is often especially crucial in the context of refugee camps (Brown et al., 2017, p. 8; Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 298).

Six of the reviewed papers specifically deal with online courses for refugee students (Brunton, Brown, Costello, Farrell, & Mahon, 2017; Crea & Sparnon, 2017; Halkic & Arnold, 2019; Muñoz, Colucci, & Smidt, 2018; Reinhardt et al., 2018; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2018). Generally, online courses were seen as a comparatively cheap potential solution for flexible learners and as independent from the local availability of tertiary education (Crea & Sparnon, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2018). However, the studies show

low completion rates (Halkic & Arnold, 2019) and point out that general challenges for higher education, such as language barriers, finances, housing, time management, etc., also impact the ability to participate in online education (Brunton et al., 2017, 17f.; Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 17). Finally, the “diversity of the target groups” (Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 17) can cause difficulties in creating online education offers that fit their diverse backgrounds and needs (Reinhardt et al., 2018, 217f.; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2018, p. 171). Therefore, online courses were perceived to be a helpful tool to “form realistic expectations about higher education study” (Brunton et al., 2017, p. 17) and to potentially “improve prospective flexible learners’ preparation for higher education study through the provision of active developmental supports, early in the study life cycle” (Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 17).

Academic research projects were also mentioned among the reactions of some HEI to increasing refugee applications, with an emphasis on participatory research as being an important step towards the academic and partly also activist independence of refugees (Fleay et al., 2019). Further, conducting research on the experience and perspective of refugees was understood to provide valuable insights to current events (Hartley et al., 2019, p. 6; Tzoraki, 2019, p. 9).

Finally, HEIs were partly described as engaging their external network in order to support refugees, mainly by creating awareness for “the importance of access to higher education and the lived experience of seeking asylum” (Fleay et al., 2019, p. 175) and creating “dialogue and collaboration among the different agents, institutions and organizations that make up the sector” (Marcu, 2018, p. 15).

2.4 Discussion

Research and literature on tertiary education for refugees have grown massively, especially since 2016. Ramsey and Baker’s (2019) literature review has shown that after four papers were published on the topic between 1999 and 2009, 26 papers were published between 2010 and 2015 (p. 60). With a focus on empirical studies, Berg et al. (2018) included three publications from 1990-2009 and 15 studies that were published between 2010 and 2015. In this review, I have discussed 103 papers, including 79 empirical studies, that were published between January 2016 and December 2019. This reflects a growing recognition of the importance of higher education for refugees and a strong increase in scholarship on the topic.

This integrative literature review has provided a broad overview of this quickly emerging and growing field. The primary focus of this growing body of literature has been the situation of refugee students, mainly the challenges they face, as well as the description and evaluation of existing support programmes. Additional topics included Canadian media-representations of international and refugee students (Anderson, 2019), historical analysis of the situation in previous decades (Sheridan, 2016), and the description of methodological approaches for research with refugee students. Most studies provided policy implications, showing the close connection this research has to the ongoing development of support programmes.

In comparison to literature published before 2016 (Berg et al., 2018; Mangan & Winter, 2017; Ramsay & Baker, 2019), the main focus on challenges for refugee students and a majority of qualitative case studies or conceptual papers emphasising the importance of higher education opportunities for refugees seem to have remained the same. Nonetheless, a new additional focus on formal study preparation (Berg, Schröder, Grüttner, 2019c; Schröder et al., 2019), slightly increased quantitative and mixed methods approaches, and a number of studies on new countries and regions all indicate the increasing importance of this research field for a number of disciplines and research areas. Similar to Ramsay and Baker's (2019) review of literature until early 2018, many of the papers discussed in this review can be placed in the broader field of education studies. In this area, the papers added to a wide range of topics such as the recognition of foreign degrees (Dunwoodie et al., 2020), programme evaluation, academic culture (Baker & Irwin, 2019), language proficiency (Nayton et al., 2019; Park, 2019), and the general areas of internationalisation (Streitwieser 2019; Berg, 2018), as well as equity, inclusion and widening participation. These studies often focused on the perspective of refugee students but also included higher education practitioners (Streitwieser, Schmidt, Gläser, & Brück, 2018b; Berg, 2018), domestic and international fellow students (Ergin, 2016; Grüttner, 2019), teachers (Schröder et al., 2019), policymakers (Jungblut, Vukasovic, & Steinhardt, 2018; Toker, 2019), NGO-members (Nayton et al., 2019), and the investigation of policies (Lisa Unangst, 2019).

Beyond education studies, the case of refugees in higher education also provides opportunities to study further questions, such as biographical identity-construction (Klaus, 2020) and psychological or social-science perspectives on wellbeing (Al-Rousan et al., 2018; Bajwa et al., 2019; Grüttner, 2019); in addition, researchers have the opportunity to investigate education as a facilitator of peace and security (Rasheed & Munoz, 2016) and

to apply theories of integration (Bacher et al., 2019). Thus, the topic of refugees in higher education offers a range of interdisciplinary connections beyond the specific case of refugee students and valuable contributions to a number of fields. However, empirical studies often investigate very small samples or case studies. It can be assumed that due to the narrow time frame of publication, many studies were conducted at the same time. In combination with the small number of previously published literature on the topic, this results in a somewhat repetitive body of literature, with a number of studies focusing on challenges for refugee students.

At this point, it would seem counterproductive to suggest one specific theoretical or methodological framework for further research. Instead, I recommend enhancing the growing methodological and theoretical diversity in order to create insights into a variety of aspects, cases, and perspectives. This would include moving beyond (single) case studies and increasing comparative, multi-perspective, and multi-level studies. On the one hand, such research could investigate the premises and conditions of successful preparation, access and participation in higher education for refugee students and identify expedient support strategies for various contexts and in accordance with the needs and lived experiences of refugee students. On the other hand, it could enhance the understanding of the diverse living situation of refugees and the institutional contexts that shape them, and broaden education research. In the following, I sum up a number of potential open questions and topics as a research agenda to further differentiate and substantiate this newly growing field.

Beyond the deficit discourse. As Ramsay and Baker (2019) argue in their literature review, research on refugee students should “go beyond a lens of issues and problems” (p. 57). Similar points are made throughout the discussion section of many of the reviewed papers. Still, a relatively small number of works investigate the capital and knowledge refugees can bring that should be valued and thematised (Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Shapiro, 2018). Studies in this area could include the benefits HEI expect from supporting refugee students but should also critically investigate norms, limits, and adaptability of academic culture (Baker & Irwin, 2019), as well as ways to create agency for refugees (Grüttner et al., 2018).

Teaching and learning strategies. Several studies mention unfamiliar teaching and learning styles as a challenge for refugee students. However, the reviewed studies do not further investigate the learning strategies of refugee students. As Parkhouse, Lu & Massaro

(2019) have pointed out, well prepared teachers can be crucial for the success of their students from marginalised communities. Higher education staff, including counsellors and teachers, often shows little diversity and is insufficiently interculturally qualified (Schammann & Younso, 2017). Further research towards a more detailed understanding of refugees as academic learners (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020) and teachings styles in intercultural higher education could provide valuable strategical and practical implications of intercultural education, along the lines of Warriner, Fredricks, & Duran's (2019) conceptual approach to teaching academic English in schools. In this context, it seems important to differentiate between teaching and learning styles and knowledge about educational systems, professional knowledge in an academic field, and knowledge of academic language, culture, and norms.

Organisational responses and contexts. Regardless of the large numbers of papers that introduce, investigate, or evaluate case studies, very few works apply organisational theory in order to understand institutional reactions and frameworks that shape the higher education system and, in more detail, the programmes for refugees (one exception for the case of an Australian university would be Webb et al., 2019). Closer investigations of institutional rationales, decision making, and potential organisational changes could bring clarity to the exact contexts of higher education for refugees; and the applicability of implications. This could also include a more detailed investigation of concepts, aspects, and strategies of integration and participation and to what extent they are able to meet the needs of refugee students. In this context, differences between the perspectives of refugee students and the personnel that shapes higher education policy and practice would be interesting to investigate. Further, research could comparatively look into whether and how offers are supposed to adapt to the manifold circumstances and needs of this diverse group. Unangst and Crea (2020) have introduced an approach to bridge the contrast between subjective identities and generalising support programmes: Intersectional programmes could consider a variety of intersectional identity markers in order to offer a range of support offers.

As previously discussed, online programmes show low completion rates. They also depend on the availability of infrastructure and time, but could, on the other hand, provide location-independent learning opportunities. Recently, the Covid-pandemic has increased the relevance of and investments in digital learning in higher education. Considering the extensive investments that are made to expand online education, it seems crucial to ensure its success and efficiency. In order to contribute to the development of online courses that

meet the needs of a diverse student population, further research should investigate the challenges and chances of online learning and its consequences for academic and social participation, especially for underrepresented groups such as refugee students.

Additionally, as not all endeavours to support refugee students originate from HEIs, it seems important to investigate all relevant public and private institutions, their actions and objectives. This includes an investigation of the impact of policies on different political and institutional levels, as Bjorklund (2018) has done in his review of research on undocumented students in higher education. Generally, a broader perspective of all populations and institutions affected by new arrivals and affecting refugees' educational opportunities seems advisable. There could be interesting overlaps with studies of civic engagement.

(Trans-)National contexts. As mentioned above, the regional foci of international research on higher education for refugees has shifted. Presumably in reaction to the war in Syria, an increasing number of studies address the situation in Germany, Turkey and several European countries. Considering that Germany has been one of the ten countries that hosted the most displaced people and has started large public funding schemes in order to allow broad offers for refugee students, the high academic interest in the situation on Germany seems unsurprising. However, as the country hosting by far the largest refugee population, Turkey has received comparatively little attention. Given the fact that 85% of refugees are hosted in developing countries and their living situations differ greatly, it seems imperative to take this variety into account by extending the regional foci of international research (UNHCR, 2020). Furthermore, as Unangst and Crea (2020) have pointed out, it seems important to look beyond national contexts and perceive refugee education as a transnational endeavour.

The impact of the Covid-pandemic. As the world adapts to the 'new normal', it becomes increasingly clear that the Covid-pandemic has not only thoroughly affected all aspects of everyday life, including higher education, but also globally exacerbated the situation of at-risk populations. Further research will need to consider and measure the impact of the Covid-pandemic. This includes the assessment of consequences for refugee education. In different contexts, quite different outcomes can be expected, from a backlash to questions of mere survival, to a shift towards online education. The outcomes for (student) mobility, migration, social security, the organisation of higher education, and many other factors that influence refugee (higher) education will yet have to be determined.

Conclusion. It can be stated that the growing body of literature importantly adds to our understanding of a hitherto understudied topic and provides new academic insights as well as crucial information for policy development and practice. The increased attention during the last years has diversified theoretical, methodological, and conceptual approaches. At the same time, the newly emerging field holds many questions that have yet to be addressed.

3 A New Aspect of Internationalisation? Specific Challenges and Support Structures for Refugees on Their Way to German Higher Education

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3.1 Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, the number of asylum applications spiked in some European countries, including Germany. Many refugees and asylum seekers have high educational aspirations (Brücker et al., 2016), and their level of education determines their chances of integration and success in the host country (Fortin, Lemieux & Torres, 2016). Therefore, the question of how to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into higher education institutions (HEIs) became increasingly relevant. Supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), universities, universities of applied sciences and preparatory colleges started the “Integra”-programs to assist refugees on their way to and through higher education (Fourier, Kracht, Latsch, Heublein & Schneider, 2017).

Based on a system theoretical intersectional perspective, this article works out what first contacts for refugees, members of the international offices and a vice-president at 5 German HEIs of internationalisation identify as specific challenges for refugees and asylum seekers⁵ on their way to German higher education, and then focuses on how German HEIs support them. Concluding, it recommends backing HEIs up financially in order to encourage and help the process of institutionalising supporting structures; and also to target more networking and exchange of information between the HEIs. The article argues for an understanding of refugee students as internationals, as an addition to the HEIs and societies’ diversity and as potentially highly skilled students.

⁵ While it will generally be referred to refugees in this text, technically, some of the prospective students are also asylum seekers, which means they do not have received a refugee status yet (see Columbia n.y.).

3.2 Access to Higher Education for International Students, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Germany

Regardless of their residential status, refugees can apply to any German higher education institution; as long as they fulfil the general criteria for international applicants, they will be treated as international students (Study In, n.y.a). Mostly, that means to hold a university entrance qualification and speak the required language, which in the vast majority of German Bachelor programs is German, on a C1 level. Study preparation and access to higher education in Germany are central issues for international students: 32% of international students come to Germany with a high school diploma, while 21% had previously studied abroad, but had not completed their studies (Apolinarski & Poskowsky, 2013, p. 4). International diplomas need to go through a process of recognition before being acknowledged as university entrance qualifications in Germany. The German Act of Recognition, however, is not applicable to school certificates obtained in non-EU countries (Anerkennung in Deutschland, n.y.). Therefore, the matriculation offices or international offices of higher education institutions take the decision on their eligibility. Preparatory courses can be a crucial aspect of access to higher education. Prospective international and refugee students with secondary diplomas that are not recognised as university entrance qualification in Germany have to take an assessment test (“*Feststellungsprüfung*”). They can enrol in either private or public⁶ preparatory colleges (“*Studienkollegs*”) to study for this test (Studienkollegs.de, n. y.). The two-semester courses cover terminology and basic knowledge in the desired academic field. In 2012, 18% of all international students had to visit a preparatory college (Apolinarski & Poskowsky, 2013, p. 5).

While technically, refugees are treated like all international (prospective) students during their application and enrolment, during the phase of study preparations they receive special support in order to deal with their specific situation. For example, the entrance criteria for the preparatory colleges already include advanced knowledge of the German language. Therefore, special classes prepare refugees for the entrance test in order to enrol in the preparatory courses that lead to the assessment test (Studienkolleg Hannover, n.y.). Additionally, HEIs started offering courses, for example language and math classes, to support prospective refugee students on their way to higher education (Beigang & von Blumenthal, 2016). In 2016, 6806 refugees and asylum seekers took part in courses offered by 135 HEIs and 37 preparatory colleges within the “Integra”-program (Fourier et al. 2017, p. 12). Due to the time needed to reach the necessary language skills for study preparations,

⁶ Cost and availability of preparatory colleges depend on the German state and the individual college.

it can be assumed that the number of refugees in preparatory courses is still going to increase. Generally, preparatory colleges and preparatory courses can be seen as important institutions for the internationalisation of German higher education and the support of prospective refugee students.

3.3 Challenges and Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers at German HEIs

In order to work out specific challenges for refugees on their way to higher education and to compare the support and integration programs at different HEIs, I conducted eight expert-interviews (Kruse, 2015, p. 166 et seq.; Bogner et al., 2002) at five HEIs in four German states (“*Bundesländer*”). My interview partners were first contacts for refugees, members of international offices, one head of an international office, and one vice-president for internationalisation. The sample consists of members of five HEIs, two universities of applied sciences and three universities, in four different German states and regions. The HEIs have been sampled based on a regional cluster to cover different areas in Germany and on their support for refugees (existing support and special programs). An additional criterion was to include a university of excellence⁷. I analysed the interviews and the mission statements for internationalisation as well as the information for refugees offered by the universities’ website with content analysis. In the following, an overview of the specific challenges for refugees the interview partners described will be given, followed by short descriptions of the sampled HEIs and their support for refugees.

Specific Challenges on the Way to Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum Seekers: An Intersectional Approach

Prospective international students face a variety of challenges in Germany. It can be assumed that, to some extent, refugees face similar difficulties as all international students, amplified by and in addition to hindrances arising from their specific situation. In addition to entrance qualification (Brücker et al., 2016, p. 5) and language, literature on the situation of international students in Germany identifies several issues, for example study culture, finances (Schammann & Younso, 2016, pp. 12–13), social isolation, information and support (Ebert & Heublein, 2017; Levantino, 2016, p. 90), gaps in the educational biography (Ebert & Heublein, 2017, p. 32) and residential status as possible central

⁷ The excellence initiative is a program by German’s federal and state’s governments to fund and support outstanding programs and institutions at selected universities. In intervals of 7 years, universities have to apply with proposed excellence clusters. Each time, 11 universities will be selected to be of excellence and receive the funding (see BMBF n.y.).

challenges for access to and success in higher education in Germany (Apolinarski & Poskowsky, 2013; Morris-Lange, 2017). Trauma (Joyce, et al., 2010) and residence obligations for asylum seekers are examples of additional hindrances for (prospective) students with the experience of forced migration.

The situation of refugees can be understood as an intersection of various factors of marginalisation. This means that those factors don't simply coexist or add up but interdepend and influence each other. They cannot be understood independently but have to be considered within their interdependence (see Müller, 2011, p. 305). Instead of focussing on set factors like race, class and gender, as it is often done in intersectional approaches (see Müller, 2011; Weinbach, 2008), this article focuses on the factors influencing refugees' integration into HEIs that members of HEIs describe from their perspective⁸, following Weinbach's (2008) system theoretical approach to Intersectionality. The factors highlighted here are those influencing the inclusion into the HEI as an organisation and cannot be understood as a holistic representation of challenges refugees face within the host society. Some of those factors also apply to national or international students with no experience of forced migration; their specific combination is due to the individual situation—in this case, the specific situation of refugees. It can be assumed that some issues are amplified and others added by the specific situation of refugees. Also, their impact differs. While language and entrance qualification influence the access to higher education directly, others can be crucial hindrances for learning conditions and the general possibility of remaining in higher education. In the following, I will give an overview of several closely connected and interdependent challenges for prospective refugee and asylum-seeking students that were described by HEIs members throughout the interviews.

Language:

“It stands and falls with German language training and finances.” (Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB)

⁸ This paper is based on the perspective of members of German HEIs. For an advanced understanding of the situation and needs of refugees, their perspective must be considered. Studies as the WeGe-project (www.wege.dzhw.eu) are working on this task. It can be assumed and some studies show that refugees will have different perspectives on some of those aspects, or even add completely others (see Stevenson and Willott 2007: 675). Harris and Marlowe indicate that staff members do not always “recognise important factors contributing to” (ibid., 2011: 190) refugee students' performance. Examples are aspects of age (Schammann and Younso 2016, p. 28) and gender (Hobsig 2004), which have only been briefly mentioned in the interviews this paper is based on.

Speaking German is a crucial skill and a requirement for applying for German higher education as well as for preparatory colleges. Preparatory colleges usually require German on at least a B1 level; HEIs often require a C1 level for inscription and also B1 for preparatory classes. More than one third of all international students describe their German as bad (Morris-Lange, 2017, p. 21; Apolinarski & Poskowsky, 2013, p. 48). While a total of 54% of international students' state to have acquired first language skills before coming to Germany. Refugees seem to start with less previous experience. In a study of the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) with 4500 refugees in Germany, 90% stated to not have had any knowledge of German when entering the country (Brücker et al., 2016, p. 7); there is no statistical information on the selective group of those who plan on studying, but according to the interviews, the level of refugees' German language skills is regularly very low in the beginning. The missing language skills of prospective refugee students in comparison with other foreign students are explained by some interview partners with the unpredicted nature of their stay in Germany. Since they mostly did not plan to study in Germany, they did not prepare it with language classes.

Another issue is the diverse quality of language classes offered for refugees. Not all of them are accepted by the universities so it has to be certain classes which, on the other hand, are not always accepted by the job centres or the immigration office. This points out another issue: Refugees have to generally consider the rules, requirements and restrictions of several institutions connected to their financial situation and their residential status.

A Multitude of Bureaucratic Requirements: The life of asylum seekers is highly regulated in Germany. Benefits, accommodation and integration support like language classes or integration courses are connected with official requirements they have to meet. They differ locally by state and on the municipal level, and partly depend directly on the person responsible. Schammann shows exemplarily how the *Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz* (*AsylbLG*), the law that regulates social benefits for refugees in Germany, depends on the interpretation of local officials (Schammann, 2015), and Täubig argues that the highly regulated and repressive everyday living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees are designed to inhibit quick integration rather than to support it (Täubig, 2009). The complication of access to higher education can be one example for that. Especially during study preparations, different and even contradicting regulations and unclear responsibilities can lead to difficulties for prospective refugee students. For example, meeting the requirements for social benefit can contradict or prevent the visit of preparatory classes. A member of the international office at university E describes a case when several members

of a family had to drop out study preparations in order to take part in a job-creation program:

I experienced it once with a whole family that somebody really worked against it. So he, I fought a long time for him to be allowed to take the German class, and fought long for the wife to also be allowed to take the German class. They all had to stop, because the job-centre or the consultant did completely not support it. It simply could not be. They absolutely had to take part in a job-creation program.” (Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB)

Finances: Depending on the level of income in the country of origin, the family background and potential scholarships, finances can be a serious difficulty for international students, despite the comparatively low study costs in Germany (Morris-Lange, 2017: 23). For asylum seekers and refugees, finances can be a crucial hindrance. Especially during the preparatory classes, they depend on benefits under the ‘Asylum-seekers Benefit Act’ or ‘Unemployment Benefit II’ (*ALG II*) (Study In, n. y.b). Depending on the length of their stay and their residential status, refugees can be supported by student loans granted under Germany’s Federal Education Assistance Act (*BAföG*) while studying, which in one interview is described as an advantage of refugees in comparison to other international students. The application requires a confirmation of admission to a HEI and can be a high bureaucratic obstacle even for national students (Morris-Lange, 2017, p. 12; also see Schammann & Younso, 2016, pp. 12–13). Even though a lot of the programs universities offer for refugees are for free or financially supported, especially the time of study preparations is precarious up to impossible; while official responsibilities for financial support are unclear.

“The *BAföG*-office says, it is the job-centres’ responsibility to pay during the hold-up time, and the job-centre says, nah, we don’t, because it is supposed to be supported by *BaföG*.” (Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB).

Entrance Qualification and Missing Documents: While 32% of refugees hold a secondary school degree with a university entrance qualification which, according to the IAB, is in most cases likely to be acknowledged as such (Brücker et al., 2016, p. 5), as for all prospective international students, the non-recognition of foreign degrees can be a serious obstacle. In 2012, 18% of all international students had to visit a preparatory

college, because their qualification was not recognised as university entrance qualification (Apolinarski & Poskowsky, 2013, p. 5). For refugees, there are some additional hindrances to be considered, an example for some cases is incomplete paperwork due to the circumstances of migration. A special case is the students from Eritrea, where a lot of people go to school, but only get a certificate after finishing their military service (ibid., p. 6). Also, especially in areas of armed conflict, a lot of refugees dropped out of school without finishing it. In case a certificate or diploma is missing, the residential status becomes important. Based on a decision of the German ministers of Education and the Arts, refugees can be given several options to still apply for higher education in case their documents are missing due to the circumstances of forced migration. The possibilities range from suitability tests to declaration on oath, and vary not only in between German states but also between single universities (Study In, n.y.c).

Gap in Educational Biography: Another challenge for refugees is the gap in their educational biography. It can be assumed that it took them some time to arrive in Germany, and then it takes time to meet the criteria for applying and enrolling at HEIs. At the time they are able to start preparatory colleges or apply for higher education, they might have been outside educational institutions for years. That adds up to cultural differences of learning and language barriers. Because of the time needed for study-preparation, the interview partners argue that the numbers of applicants with the experience of forced migration will increase heavily soon, since the people that arrived in 2015 and 2016 will soon meet the formal criteria and language proficiency to enrol.

Study Culture: Studies show that typical elements of higher education differ internationally. According to the members of the HEI, mode of discussion, self-discipline etc. can be issues for international students and refugees who have been socialised in different learning environments. Getting accustomed to a new study culture can take time and hard work, especially after some time completely outside of educational institutions (Morris-Lange, 2017, p. 22). When asked about specific challenges for refugees that want to access higher education, five of the eight interview partners described teaching and learning styles and different organisation structures of HEIs as crucial issues.

“That group work is rather unknown. That “chalk and talk” teaching is preferred.” (Interview first contact, University D, translated by JB)

As a solution, they proposed social integration and intense counselling.

Social Isolation: Many international students state that they would like to have contact with national students but find it difficult (Apolinarski & Poskowsky, 2013, p. 48). Since their support networks are mostly abroad, they need that contact for personal reasons but, most likely, also to help them get along in German higher education institutions (Morris-Lange, 2017, p. 25). One interview partner also mentioned this network when it comes to getting internship-positions. Throughout the interview, contact with peers is argued to be an important factor for social integration and therefore academic integration in Germany.

“Actually, the biggest win is that they finally meet Germans at the same age. Which is great and to me an example of really successful integration, because at some point this, this factor, is somebody a refugee or not, it does not matter at some point, because it is simply, yes, contact to peers.” (Interview first contact, UAS B, translated by JB)

Based on this, the interview partners argue to teach international students with and without the experience of forced migration together as soon as possible and quickly integrate refugees in regular classes.

Information: The availability and utilisation of consultation and support vary in connection to the local network and available information. As the first contacts describe it, for many refugees, personal interactions seem to be more important than information on the websites (see Baker et al., 2017).

“They generally look for information. So the self-information is not very strong. Many want information from face to face interaction, instead of looking it up at the internet first, as I would do it.” (Interview first contact University D, translated by JB)

Generally, international students make use of information centres more often than national students (Ebert and Heublein 2017). For refugees, counselling is especially important and also difficult because of the already mentioned involvement of many actors and regulations: “The plurality of actors involved and complexity of legislation furthermore make it difficult for refugees to quickly get the information they require, and to understand it correctly” (Levantino, 2016, p. 90). Especially during the interview with first contacts, the need of valid information was constantly emphasised and it was criticised that information gained via a personal network can

be misleading, but also that incorrect information was given to the refugees from other institutions.

“Many refugees that come to me daily have been given wrong information. [...] For example, from friends, acquaintances, the job-centre.” (Interview first contact UAS A, translated by JB)

Residential Status: More than two thirds of international students come from countries outside the European Union and need a residence permit in order to stay in Germany which needs to be renewed frequently. Academic success and finances have an impact on the renewal process. Even for successful students, this process can mean a lot of stress and put additional pressure on them and their studies (Morris-Lange, 2017, p. 24). Nonetheless, the specific situation of refugees generally seems to be more insecure. Processing times in the Asylum procedure can be months, but can also last over a year (Brands & Morris-Lange, 2016), and it is unclear if study success influences the procedure at all. Long waiting periods accompanied by the fear of deportation can cause high “psychological cost of uncertainty awaiting the outcome of the recognition process” (Levantino, 2016, p. 90).

Residence Obligation and Infrastructure: The (in)ability to choose their place of living and their freedom of movement inside the country can be an important factor for refugees. Especially during the first months, they are under residence obligations and not able to choose their place of living. Even after that, preparatory classes are only available at certain locations, so if refugees are able to participate depends on where and how well connected they live. In relation to the cooperation with other relevant institutions, as the job-centres, one interview partner mentions that it was much easier to work with the one in the university’s city than with job-centres in the region. Two interviewees mentioned the financing of public transportation tickets as a crucial hindrance for some prospective students.

“But it is very difficult that the refugees pay for the ticket to the free language class themselves. Not all of them can do that.” (Interview first contact UAS A, translated by JB)

Trauma and Psychological Stress: Having to flee a conflict zone, potentially leaving family and friends behind, living in a new country under restricted conditions and never knowing how long one is able to stay—all interview partners mention the insecure living conditions and past and present trauma as a huge challenge for refugees; they are at least

a constant distraction up to a major influence on productivity and aspirations. Most HEIs do not offer specific psychological counselling for traumatised people. While on the one hand, refugees can use the HEIs' general psychological counselling, the vice-president for internationalisation at UAS A refers to the responsibility of the whole society which points at the fact that the integration of refugees into higher education does not only depend on the support they receive from preparatory colleges and HEIs.

“When we have many traumatised people in the country, then it is actually a task of the country to take care of it. And I do think it has to be taken care of, but I don't know if it is the university's task.” (Interview vice-president for internationalisation, UAS A, translated by JB)

Absence: Three interview partners describe absence from preparatory classes as a central issue. They explain it with other responsibilities within the multitude of bureaucratic requirements, family issues, a lack of motivation caused by trauma, the need to work due to financial issues and religious reasons for absence during Ramadan. This shows how challenges on several levels manifest as an influence on study success.

“If a family member is doing badly, they sometimes stay at home. Because at this moment one has to take care of the family, not of the German class.” (Interview first contact, University D, translated by JB)

3.4 Support Structures at German HEI

In order to help refugees to deal with the previously described challenges, many German HEIs institutionalised different support structures and offers. The sample shows some differences in the specific offers; within the path dependency of pre-existing organisational structures, some of the specific offers of the sampled HEIs include strong collaboration with local businesses, specific offers for traumatised students or extensive online-classes. What all sampled HEIs have in common are language classes, academic preparation like math-courses, offers to support the social integration and the offer of access to infrastructure like libraries and Wi-Fi for refugees. Hereafter, the HEIs will be shortly described, and an overview of their specific support for refugees will be given.

University of Applied Sciences (UAS) A is focused on the combination of theory and praxis with praxis-oriented teaching and on internationally oriented research. Internationalisation is a crucial part in the UAS mission statement and broadly promoted in order to support students' career opportunities and extend research possibilities in a

globalised world and market. Therefore, the position of a vice-president for internationalisation has newly been implemented and online-courses, international study-programs, exchange programs, partnerships and international research cooperation are maintained and extended. The UAS A is well appointed with funds and staff: While the Universities of Applied Sciences A and B have about the same number of students, there are 532 enrolled students per person working at the international office, 182 less than at UAS B.

Within the international office, a position for the counselling of refugees has been established in November 2016. Because there is no nearby preparatory college available, the UAS offers a three stages study preparations program, including counselling, language classes and academic preparation. The program is supported by local companies, which offer funding. Further offerings are social events, (already existing) international study programs in English and online classes. The information on the website is addressed to prospective refugee students. While there is broad support and even funding offered, the online information for refugees is only available in German. This HEI is the only one in the sample that offers applying refugees to benefit them by raising their entrance qualification grades during the application process.

University of Applied Sciences B is practice-oriented and works closely together with relevant companies. In the University of Applied Science's Profile, student mobility is described as a crucial part in supporting the career opportunities for local students. The international office mostly focuses on student mobility, mainly via exchange programs and international study programs. There are 714 enrolled students per person working at the international office. A position of a vice-president for internationalisation and a mission statement for internationalisation have not been established yet, but within the international office, there is a department for the support of the internationalisation process and of social inclusion for international students.

Within this department, the engagement for refugees is coordinated. This was initially done within the regular working hours and partly as voluntary work. Starting with September 2017, a 20% position for the consultation of refugees was established. Even though there was no institutionalised position to do it, due to a lot of voluntary activities, the UAS B started a supporting program in 2015. The three-stage program includes counselling, language and academic courses and support for social integration. The UAS B has its own preparatory college. In addition to this and in cooperation with the local university, audits, trips and other social events, access to the library and Wi-Fi and

information on studying and applying are offered. Detailed information and related links are provided on the website in German and English. They are addressed to prospective refugee students and to already enrolled students who want to support refugees. Special about this HEI is a program that allows enrolled students to do an intercultural training and collect credit in exchange for their support of refugees. In an interview, the first contact for refugees explained that this way the voluntary engagement should be acknowledged and maintained after the topic is not present in the media anymore.

University (U) C is a university of excellence with a profile of high-quality research and a strong orientation towards internationalisation and diversity. The mission statement for internationalisation includes the mobility of students and academic staff, as well as research-cooperation and the internationalisation of teaching, including international study-programs. It explicitly emphasises service for all international incomings beyond academic questions, and a comprehensive approach. Internationalisation is meant to attract the best researchers and students and not only understood as the international office's task, but as a mission of the entire organisation. Per person working at the international office, the university has 571 enrolled students.

The support for refugees is located at the university's centre for diversity, where a 50% position has been established as a first contact and counsellor for refugees. This allocation is different to the other HEIs, where support for refugees is mostly located within the international office. That can be explained with a focus on the special needs of refugees and also with a generally stronger involvement of the centre for diversity with international students. Information for refugees on the website are available in German and mostly also in English; they address prospective students as well as academics with the experience of forced migration. Most information is about the university counselling and support offers and the criteria to apply and enrol. Support programs for refugees at university C include language classes, audits, infrastructure (access to premises, the library and Wi-Fi), a buddy-program and students initiatives like a refugee law clinic. The first contact for refugees explains in the interview that most of the service for refugee and asylum-seeking prospective students is included in services that already existed and are now extended. Newly implanted offers are the counselling service and language classes. They started in 2015. A special offer that is embedded in the already existing institutional structures is psychological counselling for people with trauma.

University D is one of the leading Technical Universities in Germany. Within its extensive internationalisation mission statement, the focus is on student mobility and exchange, additional points are networking, research cooperation, researcher's mobility and the support of a north-south dialogue. Cooperation and aims to win new international students are targeted at certain countries. The head of the international office explains this regional focus with historically grown structures. Within the sample, the international office has about half the staff compared to University E and also less international office employees but more than double as many students as University C. There are 1627 enrolled students for every person working at the international office.

Within the international office, a 50% position has been established to counsel refugees and administrate special offers for them. The university's homepage offers information for prospective students, mostly on entrance criteria, preparatory courses and colleges, relevant institutions and offers at the university and finances. For researchers with a refugee background, contact information is given in order to support connection and access to the university. All information is given in English. In addition to academic and language preparation and the regular offers of the international office and student counselling, a buddy program and students volunteer projects offer social inclusion and a refugee law clinic.

University E is the biggest university in the sample; it is almost two and a half times as large as University C. While it does have a strong focus on internationalisation in its mission statement, no position of a vice-president for internationalisation has been established yet. Internationalisation includes research cooperation, student and staff mobility and international study programs and is strongly seen in connection with a globalised market. Per person working at the international office, there are 982 enrolled students.

Within the international office, a 50% position for the counselling and the coordination of support-offerings for refugees was established in April 2017. Before that, it was done in addition to the regular work by another member of the international office. The person the university lists as a first contact for refugees is a volunteering emeritus professor, who also offers counselling for refugees. The university's homepage offers detailed information on formal criteria for application and enrolment, missing documents, language classes and preparatory courses for prospective refugee students and academics with the experience of forced migration, in German and English; central information is also available in Arabic, Sorani and Kurmanji. Compared to most other HEIs, the extensive

information available on the website for refugee and asylum-seeking academics is remarkable. The university supports refugees with German classes, audits, counselling and library-access and offers cooperation and networking for academics with a refugee background.

3.5 Conclusion

All sampled HEIs did not have special offers for refugees before 2015, which shows how closely the HEIs are connected to the topics of society. It can be understood as part of their “*Reflexivität*” (self-reflexivity) (Weinbach, 2008, p. 183), which means that HEIs as organisations reflect on their environment and react to changes as they are currently trying to find ways to include refugees in their system of higher education. Generally, this reflectivity results in special offers to prepare refugees. Many HEI members describe helping to integrate and educate refugees as one of the HEI’s contributions to society, while also they expect support and integration programs from society, the government and other actors. How far they can support refugees depends on funding, individual engagement and also on previously existing structures. For example, the only university in the sample that offers special counselling for traumatised people did already work on that topic before. For some questions, the HEI’s international office and counselling staff are just not qualified, so other structures are necessary.

“Of course, sometimes people come, who are in the middle of legal actions because [...] they got a negative notification. Then we say, okay, there is a refugee law clinic or a lawyer must be asked, but we can’t do this, also counsel on legal questions of asylum.” (Interview first contact University C, translated by JB)

After 2015, even HEIs with small international offices set up broad support structures. A lot of them started out as volunteer work and then were institutionalised; at UAS B even the student support initiatives became a part of the “*Studium Generale*” and can be rewarded with credit points. When the interviews took place in summer 2017, all sampled HEI either already had established or were establishing part-time positions for people in charge of counselling refugees and administrative support structures and courses. This is made possible by the “Integra”- program of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In most interviews, money was emphasised as a crucial factor in order to be able to guarantee the support. While generally, the first contacts for refugees maintained connections to other people in

similar positions, the need for a network to exchange ideas and experiences was mentioned several times.

Within their mission statements on internationalisation, most HEIs focus on student mobility, more or less in accordance with the academic staff's mobility and academic exchange. Different actors at the HEIs work on different aspects of the process of internationalisation: academic exchange and international research projects are usually in the area of responsibility of individual academics or departments, student mobility and service for internationals is a huge part of the international offices work, while presidents and vice-presidents for internationalisation focus on strategic cooperation and transfer of organisational structures. The support-offerings for refugees are usually also facilitated by many institutions throughout the HEIS, such as language centres, student counselling, centres for diversity and student initiatives. Their coordination is mostly located within the international office, but partly also in diversity centres.

Whether and to what extent refugees are understood as part of the HEI's internationalisation or otherwise, for example its diversification, as part of a third mission etc. will need further investigation, but in the interview, they generally seemed to be understood as prospective students with special needs. Most interview partners mention the social and academic inclusion of refugees and eventually their transformation to the status of (regular) international students as highly important. Several challenges to refugees' inclusion in the HEI are emphasised by the HEI actors, and for some of them, solutions are proposed. The integration of refugees into higher education is seen as a chance for refugees to improve their living conditions and help a quicker integration. Generally, all interviewees assume that the number of refugees applying for higher education will keep rising.

The similar challenges that are described from the experience of different actors at five HEIs in four different German states suggest that structural support for refugees on their way to higher education is necessary; so are efforts to help social integration. The aim should be to minimize disadvantages. While the different challenges can be understood as interdependent intersections, their exact occurrence and impact depend largely on the individual situation. They cannot all be addressed by just one institution, but refugees rather depend on the support by several actors and institutions, individually addressing the numerous challenges they face. This also means that refugees can be included in pre-existing support structures, and newly implemented offerings can, on long term, be of help for other groups (partly) facing similar challenges.

The support structures include several parts of the HEI, but also actors and institutions outside of higher education. Since language skills and entrance qualification are the most direct influence on compatibility with the HEI, all sampled HEI offer courses in this context. Within their path dependency of already existing structures, they organize additional offers to meet other challenges. In order to include refugees, as many of the named factors as possible should be addressed by HEIs and surrounding organisations. Especially the extension of pre-existing structures, the provision of extensive and detailed information, the interconnection of support structures within and outside of HEI and the possibility of individual solutions seem crucial in order to support (not only) refugees on their way to German HEIs. Additionally, HEIs should reflect on some of their organisational structures, like their language requirements, the non-acknowledgement of some integration-courses refugees have to visit and other bureaucratic challenges they create for refugees. For example, some access criteria might need to be revised in order to comply with the situation of refugees in Germany. This would mean to take the organisational ‘*Reflexivität*’ one step further and adjust organisational structures in order to enable the integration of a new group of students into the system of higher education.

The internationalisation of higher education, as described in the corresponding mission statements, is usually focused on program- and network-based partnerships and mobility and aims at winning high-income, highly trained students from specific areas. It mostly is a process that is pushed by and takes place within international competition. In this context, it seems obstructive to focus on refugees solely as people with special needs. Regarding the aim of the HEI members to see refugees become regular international students, it would make sense to frame them as a potential enrichment of a diverse and international HEI, but also as potential highly educated international students. This could also mean to re-think the connection between internationalisation and diversification of HEIs, and maybe shift the competitive focus of internationalisation-strategies. Structures that are implemented to support refugees can then be seen as a positive influence on the entire organisation since the support structures enrich a diverse internationalisation and might also be of use for other students on a long-term (see Schammann & Younso, 2016, p. 46). Therefore, the investment in support for refugees can be seen as a general effort towards a social and diverse system of higher education.

As a bottom line, the following points should be taken into consideration for higher education policy:

- The HEIs support of refugees depends on funding. Since finances are important to refugees as well as universities, the institutionalisation of support structures like counselling and special offers for refugees as well as the funding of refugees costs of living should be supported as much as possible.
- Most HEIs started their programs with volunteer work based on a try and error strategy. A strong network and guidelines concerning regulations and demands of other institutions can be a lot of help for them.
- While the HEI do an important job for integrating refugees, they cannot do it on their own. Integration and information for refugees should be treated as general tasks of the whole society. HEIs and actors outside of higher education should be encouraged to network and cooperate as much as possible.
- The information on the possibilities of studies for refugees should be pointed out to other relevant actors active in counselling refugees.
- Diversity and internationalisation should be framed as positive factors within a globalised world, and refugees should be seen as prospective highly capable students instead of exclusively focussing on their special needs.

4 Formalising organisational responsibility for refugees in German higher education: The case of first contact positions

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Abstract

This article addresses the formalisation of support structures for refugee students at German higher education organisations. After the refugee influx in 2015 and 2016, early support for refugees was characterised by often voluntary, informal, spontaneous activities by pioneers. Subsequently, the situation changed as higher education organisations adjusted to the new challenge and restructured their way of dealing with study-interested refugees. Based on 18 interviews with heads of international offices and with the holders of so-called first contact positions for refugees at eight German higher education organisations, we investigate – drawing on organisation sociology – these organisational responses to (prospective) refugee students. In a second step, we focus on the first contact positions as the smallest organisational units in this field of action and describe their tasks, their placement in the hierarchy, and the procedures for staffing. Our analysis shows that in response to the growing number of refugee applicants and the availability of external funding, support structures for refugees were formalised by creating and/or expanding existing organisational structures, including the establishment of first contacts as specific boundary positions and of new internal and external communication channels.

Keywords

Access to higher education; refugee students; organisational responses; first contact positions; formalisation

4.1 Introduction

Access to higher education for refugees is an important goal on the global and European political level (European Commission, EACEA & Eurydice, 2019; UNHCR, 2018). To overcome the various barriers hindering this access – with just 3% of young refugees

entering higher education compared to 36% of young people globally (UNESCO, 2018; UNHCR 2018) – refugees need specific guidance and support. Yet, Europe (EU and EFTA member states) is divided with regard to the partly contradicting policies and strategies for integrating refugees into higher education (European Commission et al., 2019). Only slightly more than half of the European countries (22 vs. 19 systems) refer to refugees in their top-level policy documents (e.g., legislation, national strategies, action plans, or white papers). Very few European countries outline any significant top-level higher education strategy. Additionally, the vast majority of refugees have settled in very few countries, and in most states higher education organisations (HEOs) are largely being left to manage the situation on their own. Hence, higher education organisations such as universities and universities of applied sciences play a central role in integrating refugees into higher education. Their support measures are manifold and include grants or scholarships, language training, welcome/introductory programmes, online programmes, personalised guidance, training for staff working with refugees and asylum seekers, support to institutions and/or fee exemptions (cf. European Commission et al., 2019, p. 16). However, only some countries like France, Italy and especially Germany combine multiple measures to integrate refugees into higher education (European Commission et al. 2019). That the German higher education system is deemed to be providing the most complete package of support measures for refugees embedded in the most comprehensive policy approach in Europe (European Commission et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2018), makes it an interesting object of investigation.

Before 2016 most German HEO did not provide specific support for refugee students, even though refugees had previously been studying in Germany. Only after the peak of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016 it became apparent that one third of the refugees show high levels of previous education (Brücker et al., 2016) and have educational aspirations on the academic level.

It should be noted that German HEOs do not collect information on their students' legal status. Thus, no statistical information is available on the actual number of refugees in higher education, including our sampled HEOs. In response to an inquiry by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), German HEOs reported an influx from 9.066 counselling for prospective refugee students during the winter semester 2015/16 to 23.798 counselling during the winter semester 2016/17 (HRK, 2020). Therefore, many universities, universities of applied sciences, and preparatory colleges (*'Studienkollegs'*) implemented specific programmes to support prospective refugee students (Schammann and Younso,

2016). Integra courses include language and academic preparation classes. After the initiation of the funding scheme managed by The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) 6.806 refugees participated in Integra courses in 2016. In 2017, the DAAD reports 10.404 refugees in Integra courses after 50% of refugee applications for Integra courses had to be declined. In 2018, 70% of refugee applicants could be accepted and 9.609 refugees participated in Integra courses (Fourier, Estevez Prado & Grüttner, 2020).

Against this background, our paper asks how German HEOs have responded to the soaring number of study-interested refugees. Our main research question is: Which structural changes were made by HEOs in this field of action in order to cope with the new situation? Drawing on concepts taken from Luhmann's organisation sociology, we specifically ask, which organisational positions, goal programmes, communication channels, and personnel decisions were generated by universities and universities of applied sciences in this regard? Additionally, we investigate what caused the observable structural changes at HEO and how far-reaching and sustainable those changes were. By answering these questions, the article strives to provide a theoretical lens for studying organisational reactions to (prospective) refugee students and to show how HEOs cope with demanding and unforeseen societal challenges.

After a brief overview of the state of research on higher education for refugees (section 2), we introduce some core concepts of Luhmann's organisation sociology as building blocks of our analytical framework (section 3). Then we describe our data and methods (section 4) and present the findings of the expert-interviews with heads of international offices and with the holders of first contact positions (section 5 and 6). The closing summary discusses our results in the context of organisational change in academia and raises questions for further research (section 7).

4.2 Research on higher education for refugees

The greater part of the research on education for refugees has focused on primary and secondary education (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). However, in recent years and parallel to the growing public interest, the topic of refugees in higher education has received increased attention. International inquiries mostly focus either on challenges for refugees in entering and succeeding in higher education (such as a lack of social, cultural, and linguistic capital, the acknowledgement of credentials, or a mismatch between societal expectations and the needs of refugee students (Gateley, 2015; Sheikh et al., 2019; Stevenson and Baker, 2018), or on the evaluation of individual support initiatives that focus on academic and social

integration (Bajwa et al., 2017; Park, 2019). Additional topics are online courses for refugees (Halkic & Arnold, 2019; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2018), the situation in refugee camps (AbduRazak et al., 2019; Bellino & Hure, 2018) or methodological aspects of research with refugee students (Baker et al., 2019a).

A growing number of studies address the situation in Germany, investigating study preparations and varying pathways into higher education (Schröder et al., 2019; Kreimer & Boenigk, 2019; Streitwieser & Brück, 2018) or describing the situation and needs of refugee students (Schneider, 2018). Unangst (2019) discusses a number of policy implications regarding offers at German HEOs, including technical language training, emergency funds, and the establishment of best practice examples. However, beyond interest in these support offers, the responses of HEO to the novel situation remain underexplored.

Studies on reactions of German HEOs to the influx of refugees are – aside from a few (descriptive or evaluative) case studies – quite rare. Some papers provide quantitative (Beigang et al., 2018) and qualitative (Iwers-Stelljes et al., 2016) overviews of responses to increasing numbers of refugee students. Schammann and Younso (2016) describe early reactions at German HEO and develop implications for further support program implementations. Berg (2018) investigates the ascribed needs of refugee students and the respective support measures from the perspective of German HEO staff. Her analysis shows the path-dependent development of support which is based on previously existing offers for other groups of students. Internationally, Webb et al. (2019), using a neo-institutionalist framework in their case-study of a scholarship-program at an Australian university, examine formal admission and assessment procedures as well as equity policies regarding refugees and asylum seekers. They show how equity-policies are based on ascribed and not necessarily actual needs. They further emphasise the importance of individual background, networks and normative presuppositions of individual staff-members for the realisation of equity policies.

Comparable to the case investigated by Webb et al., our sampled HEOs have started to implement offers for refugees in recent years. While this is well known, the reasons behind these offers as well as the accompanying structural changes within HEO have – to our knowledge – not been investigated from the perspective of organisational theory, yet. Addressing this research gap, the article focuses on the organisational responses of German HEOs to the demands of refugees, drawing on Luhmann's organisational sociology in order to describe and analyse the formalisation of support structures in this field of action.

4.3 Analytical framework

According to Luhmann, formal organisations are a specific variety of social systems (Luhmann, 1995; 2018; Seidl & Mormann, 2015). As such, they draw their boundaries to the environment and reproduce themselves through (the communication of) decisions. Decisions are contingent choices attributed to specific positions within the organisation, e.g. hiring a new employee which is decided upon by the management. But they are nothing short of arbitrary acts as they are systematically enabled or restricted by organisational structures. Luhmann distinguishes between three of these structures: decision programmes (i.e., goal and conditional programmes), communication channels, and personnel (Luhmann, 2018[2011], p. 181). These structures (which belong to individual positions, departments, or to the organisation as a whole; Köhl, 2013) do not determine future decisions, but make decisions more or less likely. They are formal structures insofar as the organisation can (and actually has) decided upon them whereas the organisational culture (consisting of non-decidable attitudes, mindsets, or value propositions) is an informal structure (Köhl, 2013; Luhmann, 2018[2011]). In the following, we use these structures as an analytical framework for investigating how universities and universities of applied sciences react to refugees and asylum seekers.

Decision programmes are supposed to orient the organisation's decision making through setting goals on the one hand (goal programmes) and through defining clear-cut responses to well defined inputs on the other (conditional programmes). Goal programmes inform the organisation and its members about what they are supposed to achieve. In universities, the top goal programmes are teaching and research (Kleimann, 2019), whereas universities of applied sciences are expected, in addition to teaching, to execute applied research. This article specifically investigates the goal programmes of first contact positions for refugees from the perspective of first contacts themselves and of heads of international offices.

Another type of decision programme are conditional programmes. As if-then-rules, they define how a specific input (e.g., a student's application for admission) has to be processed within the organisation. In contrast to goal programmes, the sequence of actions here is determined, and decisions which are not explicitly permitted are forbidden. Thus, conditional programmes (e.g., regulations for enrolment or internal resource allocation) (Kleimann & Klawitter, 2017) regulate in some detail the way in which specific tasks are to be processed. In our case, the state's third-party-funding for refugee-oriented

programmes or the general admission rules for applicants can be viewed as conditional programmes.

Another formal structure of organisations is communication channels (Kühl, 2013; Luhmann, 2018[2011]) – e.g. the organisational hierarchy. They determine who is allowed to communicate with whom (participation rights) or required to do so (reporting duties). In order to enable decision-making and secure obedience, they channel the flow of information and allocate competences to certain organisational units and positions. In this article, we concentrate mainly on the communication channels of first contacts for refugees.

The last variety of formal organisational structures is personnel (Luhmann, 2006, p.279 et seq.). Persons constitute a sort of organisational structure insofar as their individual characteristics have an influence on how they make decisions. The professional background, for example, affects the way problems are dealt with, so that psychologists tackle organisational conflicts unlike jurists. The same applies to other personal features like educational and socio-economic background, age, or gender, as they render some decisions more likely than others (Kühl, 2013). This impact of personnel is especially strong in areas where goal programmes prevail – e.g. in HEOs because their main goal programmes (teaching and research) are “unclear technologies” (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972) and cannot be executed just by following strict rules. Taking this into account and relating to the incumbents of first contact positions, we have gathered information on their previous jobs, professional qualification, and personal attitudes.

This set of organisational structures – goal programmes, conditional programmes, communication channels, and personnel – serves our analysis as an analytical framework for investigating how and to what extent German HEOs have modified their internal structures in order to prepare for the demands and needs of refugee and asylum seeker students.

4.4 Data and methods

Our investigation is based on the analysis of 18 expert-interviews (conducted between August 2017 and July 2018) with members of eight German HEOs. Six of the interviews come from a preceding exploratory study (Berg, 2018). The final sample includes four universities (U) and four universities of applied sciences (FH) which were chosen along criteria like existing offers for refugees, diverse mission statements, and regional distribution. Regarding the mission statements, two different sets of universities and universities of applied sciences were sampled: the first set emphasises social responsibility

and widening participation, the other on internationalisation. The sampled HEOs are located in seven German states, including South, West, North, East and Central German regions, and in cities of different sizes. Hence, our sample covers a wide variety of socio-structural contexts.

At each HEO, the head of international office and the person that was named on their website as first contact⁹ for refugees were interviewed. In one case, two people were listed as first contacts, so both of them were interviewed. At one university of applied sciences, an interview with a former first contact (who counselled refugees before an official position was established) was available and additionally included in the analysis. The interview guideline encompassed questions about existing offers for refugees, the initiation and institutionalisation of these offers as well as their potential development in the future. Professional networks, resources, and the interviewees' understanding of refugees were also addressed. In this way, we tried to reveal the main structural changes regarding positions, goal programs, communication channels and personnel in the field of support for refugees in order to address our following research questions:

- Which structural changes were made, i.e. which organisational positions, goal programmes, communication channels, and personnel decisions were generated by the sampled HEOs?
- What were the reasons for these changes?
- How far-reaching and sustainable were they?

Luhmann's (2006) analytical framework was used in two ways: first, it provided the background for designing the semi-structured interview guide, and second it informed the coding of the transcripts with the use of MAXQDA. Centred around Luhmann's organisational structures named above, the analytical framework was extended inductively while coding. After the first round of coding, we recategorized and interpreted the codes based on sensitising concepts in accordance with our main research focus – the organisational response of German HEO to refugees. In order to increase the inter-coder reliability of our analysis, coding and re-categorisation were done by different researchers. Several interpretation sessions were held and all results were discussed in a final session. In this way we developed a common understanding and interpretation of our material and results.

⁹ Some HEOs call the position 'counsellor' or 'contact for (prospective) refugee students'. We uniformly use the term 'first contact position'.

4.5 Findings

4.5.1 The emergence of HEOs' organisational responses to the influx of refugees

In order to unveil causes of structural changes in HEOs during the refugee influx, this section deals with both external changes in the HEOs' environment and internal shifts that resulted in new challenges and prompted HEOs to respond.

External factors

From the perspective of HEOs in Germany, the need to set up new or adjust existing support for refugee students emerged in the wake of the unexpected influx of refugees from Syria and other countries in 2015. The migration dynamics were accompanied by new semantics depicting highly skilled refugees as future professionals for the German labour market (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018).

Our interviews show that in general three main external changes triggered the HEOs' development of support for refugees: first the discourse on the need to support refugees in pursuing their academic aspirations, second direct contact with prospective refugee students seeking assistance at HEOs, and third the availability of public financial resources that allowed HEOs to either create or expand their support.

“In 2015, the need was sort of clear. Or just, yes, present and at least this student engagement for refugees was initiated by a student himself here, which is totally admirable. [...] One realised that this had to be institutionalised [...]. Then the university and the university of applied sciences decided together: ‘Ah! Okay. Here one can raise funding from the DAAD and then we will establish a professional position, because it is getting too much. One cannot let this happen besides regular student counselling, because there are suddenly many more people who just have these needs. “(FH 1 Exp 2 first contact; all quotes were translated by the authors)

On the political level, the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBWF) initiated the programmes ‘Integra’ and ‘Welcome’ in 2016 to support organisational and student engagement for prospective refugee and asylum-seeking students (Fourier et al. 2020). Many German states (*‘Bundesländer’*) started similar programmes. With the help of these resources, HEOs established new offers for refugees, modified existing ones, and adapted internal structures and processes to the changing environment.

From informal to formal support for refugees: internal factors

In 2015 and 2016, members of matriculation offices and especially international offices (the latter usually being in charge of communicating with prospective international students) realised an influx of refugees seeking information on how to study in Germany. This was due to the specific “boundary position” (Luhmann, 1976) of these members within the organisation. Boundary positions represent the organisation externally and serve to interact with specific sections of the organisations’ environment, channelling and passing on external communication into the organisation and vice versa. They become even more important, if environmental expectations shift quickly and, thus, urge the organisation to respond. Therefore, boundary positions are stabilizing the organisation by absorbing uncertainty (Luhmann, 2018[2011], p. 178).

For the members of international offices, the influx of refugee applicants changed the section of the organisation’s environment they had to communicate with. Before the influx, refugees would just have been treated like any other international student. But now the huge number of refugees seeking special counselling and partly exceeding the capacities of student counselling staff, combined with the growing expectation of support for refugees and linked to semantics of social responsibility and specific needs, spurred the organisation to recognise the new situation and to respond accordingly.

Hence, pioneers belonging to different status groups and organisational units within HEOs started to support refugees – in most cases informally, some also officially. Our interview partners have described that students were among the first actors in HEOs to notice and organize offers for refugees who were interested in taking up or continuing their academic studies. At the same time, academic and administrative staff and presidia started to act as well. In some cases, pioneers integrated new tasks into their field of duties. For example, members of international offices began to counsel refugees as part of their task of counselling foreign students. In other cases, pioneers wound up building new organisational solutions themselves. This was done e.g. by the organisations’ (middle) management, which started to collect or readdress available funding, but also by students who launched initiatives to support refugees. While in four of the sampled HEOs boundary positions located in international offices expanded their responsibility, in two others students or the presidium gave the impulse to support refugees. Over all, these initiatives confirm the importance of personnel in reshaping organisational structures (Luhmann, 2018[2011], pp. 231f; Webb et al., 2019).

“And first there were various decentral initiatives, as I would like to call them. Meaning that faculties or individual professors launched research projects. Or also individual staff member activities, spontaneous support projects. Also, students engaged in refugee work. And then it became quasi-official via the international offices, [...] and then funded by the state [*Bundesland*]. And the international offices could of course not decide alone, but are of course dependent on the approval of the university administration, which of course has to support it as well. “(U3E2)

Following those initial actions and making use of newly available resources, HEOs deliberately created formal structures in order to support refugees. On the level of conditional programmes, they introduced residence status as a new criterion to manage access to specific offers. Additionally, in order to meet the (assumed) needs, temporary programmes were initiated in order to help refugees to meet admission criteria or to provide access to infrastructures such as WiFi or libraries (Beigang et al., 2018; Berg, 2018). As most HEOs had no available experience of how to organise support for refugees, new formal structures, such as the first contact positions, had to be developed and implemented (Luhmann, 2018[2011]). Three types of these structures can be distinguished: First, those that are newly and exclusively created for refugees. Partly, external funding was specifically understood to have been granted for those exclusive offers. Second, structures that are newly created for refugees, but also available for other groups such as international students with no experience of forced migration, and thirdly the inclusion of refugees into existing structures by opening or altering the latter, as the following quote exemplarily shows:

“So, there just was an increasing number of refugees coming to our opening hours. Or to me. And they wanted to know how studying works. And there was always the difficulty that they had no German proficiency, or no German proficiency sufficient for studying. Therefore we, our [programme for international students], which we already had at the time, yes, we opened it. And adjusted it with a few specifics for refugees. “(FH4E2)

The fact that these structures were often developed through extending previously existent structures shows the HEO’s path-dependency in dealing with uncertain environments. While some interviewees emphasised the importance of establishing exclusive offers for

refugees, others were striving to quickly include them into programmes for all or for international students in order to overcome boundaries and foster social integration.

In general, the structural changes HEOs have implemented can be described as a process of *formalisation*. Formalisation means that previously non-regulated issues are explicitly decided upon and assigned to specific organisational positions or units (Groddeck & Wilz, 2015; Kühl, 2013; Luhmann, 1976). This entails that (new) tasks, responsibilities and communication channels are defined (sometimes along with the allocation of budgets) within the organisation. It is through this process of formalisation that HEOs were able to cope quickly and officially with the challenge of integrating refugee students.

4.5.2 Organised responsibility: The first contact position

Besides offering a variety of support programmes for refugees, the implementation of a new boundary position for this target group was a common measure among German HEOs. Each HEO in our sample had established such a ‘first contact’ position and, thus, formalised the responsibility for taking care of this group of students. In the following section, we focus on some of the relevant formal characteristics of this position.

The importance of personnel

As mentioned before, personnel have a bearing on the way organisational decisions are made. For example, the professional background of staff affects how problems are dealt with. Therefore, we asked how and whom HEOs did recruit for the new position of first contact. Some of the sampled HEOs chose an internal recruitment process and restricted the pool of candidates to persons from pre-existing staff (e.g., employees whose contracts were about to expire or former student assistants). Other HEOs recruited persons from outside the higher education system. In these cases, prior occupational experiences with refugees gathered in refugee advice centres or reception centres (*‘Erstaufnahmeeinrichtungen’*) were of paramount importance – especially with regard to supporting refugees in legal, societal, and psychosocial issues. Furthermore, our analysis shows that the different professional backgrounds and work experiences of these incumbents of first contact positions resulted in different approaches to create and maintain communication channels within and outside the organisation, which we will get back to in a later section (6.3).

However, the time-limit of the first contact positions reduces their chances to accomplish sustainable goals. All first contact positions in our sampled HEOs had fixed-term contracts with working hours varying from part-time to full-time. On the one hand this is due to the fact that the positions are externally funded by the programme ‘Integra’ which only provides time-limited resources. On the other hand, this is in line with the fact that most positions in German HEOs both in the academic and (increasingly) in the non-academic areas are fixed-term positions. E.g., 83 percent of academic staff have fixed-term contracts (DeStatis 2018).

Tasks of first contacts

First contacts are generally responsible for several fields of activities:

“Well, I am responsible here for counselling and support for refugees, and yes, as that term implies, I advise the refugees when they come to us and explain their situation. Tell them which possibilities exist at the university. Advise, however, even if, for example, enrolling in a university is out of the question, who to turn to when it comes to training or something else. And yes, I'm also in charge of organising, so I'm also in contact with teachers and language institutes and organise the whole thing, as well as the financing of the projects.”
(FH4E1)

They counsel study-interested refugees by providing crucial information on enrolment and studying in Germany, by identifying previous skills and certificates, by assisting with the application process and partly by liaising with immigration offices and other offices like jobcentres, *BAföG*-offices (*‘Amt für Ausbildungsförderung’*, in charge of public financial support for eligible students), or welfare organisations. Another task is the coordination of the various offers for refugees (like language courses or preparatory courses) which are provided by different university units. A third area of responsibility consists in managing budgets (particularly external funds) and fulfilling the required reporting obligations. Additionally, in all sampled HEO, the ‘first contacts’ serve as formal boundary positions for internal and external communications about all matters concerning refugee students.

“What is special in that case is that in fact all persons with a refugee background first come to me, ideally. Even if they go elsewhere (...) I already have such good contact with my colleagues (...) that refugees will still be directed to me anyway. That is, this is the absolutely particular task, because I

am, I believe, in the university the only person who is explicitly responsible for refugees. (...) I am also concerned with residence and refugee rights and such problematics, [...] I believe, I am actually the central contact person. (U1E1)

This entails networking activities as one of the interviewees stated: “(...) *networking is important for an adequate flow of information*” (FH1E1). The networking activities refer to both internal and external networks and lead to paving new communication channels within the HEO as well as between the HEO and its environment.

Communication channels

The investigation of the communication channels of first contacts shows how they are embedded in the organisational hierarchy and how they contribute to and participate in internal and external networks.

In our sample, the first contact position is usually affiliated with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) which is the national agency for the internationalisation of the German higher education system.

“Well, it's just that at the central level, the International Office in particular is the point of contact, even though the target group of refugees is a bit of a target group that is in between German students and international students. [...] But here at the central level, the responsibility lies clearly with the International Office”. (U3E2)

However, this allocation of the first contact position to the International Office is only one possibility. As the quote shows, it is not predefined which of the well-known target groups of HEOs refugees are assigned to and, consequently, which organisational unit first contact positions are located in. Some examples in our sample show that the position of first contact is located in the Equal Opportunities Office or in the Diversity Management Office or in the Central Student Advisory Service and not in the International Office.

“Yes, well from our perspective, the project [for refugees] is there for that, just, (.) I mean, that's why it is affiliated with us in the Equal Opportunities Rectorate, [...] because equal opportunities [...] are created for access that - that also international and, in our case, recently escaped prospective students also have a chance, have an equal opportunity to get into the study programmes.” (U1E1)

The quote is remarkable as it suggests that HEOs differ in their rationales concerning the newly established target group “refugees”. It illustrates that it is not clear whether the needs of study-interested refugees are a question of internationalisation (International Offices), a matter of equal opportunities (Equity/Diversity Management Department), or a task of the Central Student Advisory Service.

The second aspect of the first contact positions’ communication channels we have examined are their professional ego-centred networks. With regard to these networks, we discern internal and external communication channels. Internally, the new position of first contact usually is connected to a variety of organisational units such as language centres, central student services, admission and examination offices or psychological counselling centres. This indicates that the goal programme of the first contact position can only be accomplished through cross-sectional networking.

The external communication channels are manifold, too, and involve various organisations like immigration offices, municipalities, job centres, *BAföG*-offices, welfare organisations, or refugee advice centres. Some of those communicative relations (like those to the job centres) are new or rather unusual for HEOs and their organisational sub-units. Especially for the representatives of international offices, communicative relations to *BAföG*-offices are uncommon since regular international students are not allowed to receive this kind of financial support. This shows that unusual and function-specific communication channels for first contact positions have been established in order to enable them to do their job.

Asked to compare the relevance of internal and external communication channels, the interviewees in our sample gave different answers. Depending on the individual professional background they show either preference for internal or for external communication. Those with a professional background in HEOs focus rather on internal communication channels involving other university units and members. First contacts with a professional background in refugee advice centres, reception centres (*Erstaufnahmeeinrichtungen*), or in welfare organisations relate more frequently the use of external communication channels. Hence, the previous professional experience of the first contacts determines the way they effectuate the communicative tasks of their position.

The variety of the first contacts’ internal and external communication channels is a common characteristic of the HEOs we have investigated. The dense net of internal and external relations underpins once more the claim that the first contact positions are a boundary positions (Luhmann, 1976) which represent the goal programme ‘responsibility

for supporting refugees' towards both the organisational members (within the organisation) and to the organisational environment, simultaneously channelling and passing on important information from the environment to the organisation and vice versa.

In summary, regarding the support for refugee students, first contact positions are supposed to accomplish a triple task: First, they undertake the organisation's communication with prospective refugee students as a new target group. Second, they coordinate and channel the communication of the various organisational units regarding this new target group. And third, they are boundary positions interconnected to the task-related societal environment of HEOs – visible through their various external communication channels.

4.6 Discussion and conclusion: From responses to responsibility

The subjects of our investigation were specific organisational units in German higher education organisations. It has shown how the organisational responsibility for supporting refugees in German HEO has emerged and was fostered through the formalisation of organisational structures, i.e. specific positions (first contact), personnel decisions (choice of incumbents for the first contact position), goal programs (as task of the first contact position), and (emerging) communication channels. In most studies on refugees in German higher education, this process of the HEOs' structural response is not explicitly addressed. Against this background, we briefly resume what caused which structural changes and then discuss the sustainability of those changes.

Several different factors have had an influence on the response of German HEOs to the refugee influx. Externally, the growing societal discourse on the need to support prospective refugee students (which was echoed and put forward by pioneers within the HEOs) was one factor (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018). Second, the immediate contact of universities with refugees who wanted to continue or start their studies in Germany has triggered structural changes. And third, the availability of public funding was important, too (Unangst, 2019). Internally, formal and informal acts of pioneers and decentral activities became formalised and led to new, specifically refugee-oriented structures. Initiatives for those changes came from various organisational levels: students, academic as well as administrative staff, and even some HEOs' presidents. While early responses and measures mostly were informal and voluntary, they subsequently became formalised. This enabled the organisation to deal with the (anticipated or experienced) high number of study-interested refugees without being dependent on individual commitment and

motivation (Kühl, 2013). In response to the external and internal factors, HEOs included refugees in their narrative of organisational responsibility and – partly – of internationalisation. This narrative paved the path and accompanied a number of structural changes. Based on early experiences with the refugees' demand and on the anticipation of their needs, existing organisational structures were (temporarily) altered and new formal structures were (temporarily) implemented, serving the purpose to support the refugees' access to HE.

All sampled HEO established first contact positions for counselling refugees, organising support and establishing as well as maintaining internal and external communication channels. These positions are formal boundary positions, channelling information between organisational units and the organisational environment with regard to refugee students. They replaced informal initiatives with organised responsibility.

From the point of view of organisation sociology, our observations show that HEO (like all organisations) tend to create new positions in order to remain flexible and innovative (Luhmann, 2018[2011], p. 255). However, our research also indicates that the new structures are not likely to have far-reaching temporal, factual, or social effects within the HEOs. Rather, they belong to the outside-oriented formal structure (Meyer and Rowan 1977) of organisations, to their organisational façade (Kühl, 2013) which organisations set up to gain legitimacy from their environment. The implemented goal programmes are only temporary projects limited to the time frame of available funding. Additionally, changes are restricted to the provision of support offers for refugees which are supposed to enable them to meet the criteria of applying for HE or for specific courses. But other organisational structures potentially affecting refugee students – in this case the conditional programmes regulating access and participation – in most cases remained unchanged: this applies to admission criteria, curricula, teaching styles, learning content, performance expectations etc. As to the social dimension, the goal programme of providing support for refugee students has addressed only a rather small and very specific subset of the 2.89 million students in Germany (DeStatis, 2020): So all in all, taking care of study-interested refugees does not seem to trigger far-reaching structural shifts in HEOs.

Another fact that prevents long-term effects is the limited access to financial resources. The indispensability of external funding for the sustainability and longevity of new structures for refugee students became obvious especially during the interviews conducted in 2018; they revealed the interviewees' great insecurity about the future of the established structures and programmes, as the continuation and extent of further funding

was unclear at that time. This indicates that the support for refugees was and still is organised as a *project*. This is problematic with regard to the sustainability of support, but serves two organisational interests of HEOs. First, projects are by definition finite and reversible, meaning that they can easily be adapted in terms of duration, expenditure and extent to changing circumstances. Second, the form of project-based work corresponds to the project form in which HEO carry out research (Besio, 2009; Torka, 2009). This correspondence of project-based support to the dominant form of research fosters the legitimacy of temporary structural shifts in HEOs.

The bottom line of our findings is ambivalent with regard to the readiness of German HEOs for structural changes: On the one hand, the observable modifications prove that actions of pioneers, flanked by discursive pressure, are able to initiate (at least) a temporary, formalised shift of goal programmes and other organisational structures, especially when encountering windows of opportunity in form of external funding. However, on the other hand the time limitation, locality and specificity of the formalised, but only temporarily implemented support measures for refugee students have left the structures of the HEOs' internationalisation and diversity offices widely untouched. This can be comprehended as an example of how partial change of organisational systems supports their overall stability – as Weick had stressed in his account of universities as loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976). This could also be taken as an instance of slightly adjusting organisational programmes and semantics in order to answer new challenges, in this case by step-by-step integrating refugees into the group of international students and associating them with internationalisation (which 15 years back was beyond imagination in the discourse about the internationalisation of HE; Hahn, 2004).

It could be an interesting task for future research to look into the sustainability of the developments we have described in order to provide further insights into the degree of organisational change and organizational responsiveness in academia. Especially the temporal limitation of offers for refugee students should be analysed in view of the fact that many refugees need more time to obtain the necessary language proficiency and to deal with other challenges on their way into higher education. So, chances are that many support programmes may expire before they could actually come to fruition, thus jeopardising the sustainability of the measures taken.

5 Expectations, experiences and anticipated outcomes of supporting refugee students in Germany - A systems theoretical analysis of organizational semantics

Jana Berg

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Abstract

Since 2015, many German higher education organizations (HEOs) have started programs to assist refugee students. Most of those initiatives focus on study preparation. Formally, refugees are treated as non-EU international applicants by German HEOs. The support structures are, however, based on a newly invented differentiation that introduced residence status as a relevant criterion for inclusion in support structures. Interviews with eight heads of international offices and 10 first contacts for refugees at eight HEOs show a variety of motivations for supporting refugees, including increased internationalization or diversification as well as following a third mission of social responsibility. Based on a systems theoretical discourse analysis, this paper analyzes how HEO members perceive refugees and which organizational rationales to support refugees they refer to. In this context, the paper asks whether or to what extent refugees are understood to be a part of the internationalization of higher education and how experiences with refugees could change organizational discourses.

Keywords

Refugee students, systems theory, semantics, discourse analysis, internationalization

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6 International or refugee students? Shifting organisational discourses on refugee students at German higher education organisations

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Abstract

Following the refugee influx of 2015 and 2016, many German higher education organisations (HEOs) responded with support programmes for refugee students. In this context, refugees became formally and discursively differentiated from other international students. During later stages of the programmes, this differentiation became blurred, and discourse surrounding refugee students partly shifted back to framing them as international students, which is also represented in further support programme development. Based on a systems theoretical framework, this paper investigates the shifting organisational discourse on refugee students within the context of functional needs and structural changes at German HEOs. The analysis shows that structural development is strongly related to the way functional needs and ways to address them are constituted by discursive representations. It is based on 25 expert interviews with heads of international offices and first contacts for refugees at eight German HEOs.

Keywords

Refugee students; higher education for refugees; discourse analysis; international students; discourse and structure; equity; inclusion

6.1 Introduction

Following the war in Syria, the German Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) counted 441.899 new asylum applications in 2015, and 722.370 new applications in 2016 (BAMF 2020). Within the context of this peak in new asylum applications coupled with an international push for higher education for refugees (Yildiz 2019; UNHCR 2019), the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) started funding schemes for refugee student support programmes at German higher education organisations (HEOs) and preparatory colleges

Along with the increased public interest, a growing number of academic studies have been looking into higher education for refugees during recent years. While they often focus on the experiences and needs of refugee students (Akbalsi et al. 2019; Sontag 2019; Schneider 2018) and partly also on the introduction of support measures (Marcu 2018; Tzoraki 2019), only very few authors have used organisational theory to investigate offers for refugee students (Webb et al. 2019; Beigang 2021). However, organisational theory offers the opportunity to extend our understanding of the organisational contexts shaping the experiences of refugee students, and also to investigate the development of support programmes as an example of organisational responses to urgent developments and needs to act. Such organisational responsiveness cannot be planned and often has to be mapped out on a very short notice due to sudden changes and challenges- such as rapidly rising numbers of prospective refugee students applications or the Covid-pandemic. Immediate responses need to create new solutions in shifted environments and thus allow insights to the way organisations process challenges and create new as well as adapt old structures. Further, it shows the orientations they use with little time at hand. My research shows immediate reactions and further developments of structural changes and adaptations in the context of shifting narratives and highlights how HEIs struggle to meet challenges while reinforcing their original functions.

Based on interviews with heads of international offices and first contacts for refugee students, I aim to investigate the rapid and well-funded development of support programmes for refugee students as an example of HEO responsiveness to the needs of a newly emerging, or rather, in this case, newly defined target group. The analysis shows how discourses justify and shape organisational structures and shows the interplay between organisational discourse and structural development during and after organisational responses to urgent social developments. While previous research has highlighted the importance of social expectations to support refugee students (Streitwieser & Brück 2018)

as well as the activities of individual HEO members for the realisation of support offers (Webb et al. 2019), I aim to analyse how exactly the perception of refugee students has shaped and been shaped by the specific realisation of support structures at German HEOs by answering the following research questions:

- How are the organisational discourse on refugee students and the creation of support structures interrelated?
- How did organisational discourse on refugee students change throughout the duration of the student support projects?

By addressing these questions, I aim to develop an understanding of how organisational discourse, meaning the way refugee students are communicatively constituted as a group with specific characteristics within HEOs, changes based on changing functional objectives and how those discourses are manifested by the way support for refugee students is realised. Thus, the paper contributes to higher education research by investigating how discourse shapes organisational responsiveness to acute developments. It shows that structural development is not self-evident, but related to the way functional needs and ways to address them are constituted by discursive representations. For further research, this emphasises the importance of analysing representations. For higher education practitioners, this can be seen as an indicator to reflect on the origins and effects of discursive representations as well as external factors and frequently re-connect with the target group in order to clarify misunderstandings and re-adjust misrepresentations.

The results add on to a field that often focusses on the experiences and needs of refugee students and provides insights to organisational logics they are confronted with. In the context of refugee studies, this work exemplarily shows how discourses are manifested in institutional structures. In addition to emphasizing the importance of accurate representation, the paper aims to exemplarily use organisational theory to deepen our understanding of how institutional contexts that are central for refugees' experiences and chances in their host countries are established. This conceptual connection of representation, organisational discourse and structure development could be used to analyse living conditions of refugees beyond the scope of higher education. Finally, I suggest open research questions that could extend our understanding of organisational responses to refugees in higher education at the end of the paper.

The term 'refugee students' broadly refers to the interviewees' understanding of the term. Some support programmes are only open for students that applied for asylum in Germany. However, legal status is usually not checked before administering

programme features such as counselling. Thus, in many cases, the term is likely not primarily related to a legal status, rather to the self-identification of students and/or the interviewees' identification of refugee students.

6.2 Literature

Streitwieser distinguishes three types of participants in international education based on their motivation to migrate to a new country: First, 'mobility for enlightenment represents a voluntary educational enrichment for participants' (2019, p. 5). Second, mobility for opportunity refers to those who 'are generally focused on finding opportunities that are not afforded to their social, racial, ethnic, or national constituency or group' (2019, p. 6). And finally, 'the third group, Mobility for Survival, are those who are engaging in mobility for no other reason than that they have been forced out of their home countries or regions to find a new safe haven elsewhere' (ibid.). Arguably, the first group is mainly what we refer to when we speak of 'international students' and is often the focus of research surrounding international higher education. During recent years, however, research on higher education for refugees has increased along with public interest in the topic. Most studies designate refugee students as their own unique group and focus on examining students' everyday living conditions, their unique challenges and their chances of entering and completing higher education courses (Dahya and Dryden-Peterson 2017; Streitwieser et al. 2018; AbduRazak et al. 2019; Ramsay and Baker 2019). They may also focus on evaluating and investigating refugee student support programmes (Bajwa et al. 2018; Baker et al. 2017; Unangst 2019; Beigang et al. 2018; Schammann and Younso 2016, 2017). I intend to introduce a new perspective to the research on higher education for refugee students by investigating the interplay between organisational discourse and the initiation, formalisation and further development of programmatic offers for refugee students at German HEOs. I believe that understanding how refugees are perceived and positioned within organisational structures can extend our understanding of the presuppositions the newly created support structures are based on. These structures determine the structural conditions refugees face while entering and obtaining a higher education, and can be crucial for the (mis)representation of refugee students' needs and interests (Dunwoodie et al., 2020).

6.3 Discursive representations of international students with and without the experience of forced migration

'International students are a diverse group, but they have often been spoken about in academic literature and in academic conversations as an entity, rather than as individuals with a range of personal histories and experiences, and a range of personal motivations and desires which have constructed the desire to become an international student.' (Koehne 2005, p. 104)

Research on discursive representations of international students has shown a variety of attributions and discursive constructions. In for-profit higher education systems, international students are often described as customers or consumers, buying and consuming higher education as a biographic and labour-market oriented investment (Lomer 2018; Koehne 2005). However, studies on discursive representations of international students have shown a number of alternative constructions, such as students as future assets for national labour markets or hard-working and productive contributors to the success, prestige and international positioning of HEOs (Brooks 2018). Overall, there appear to be competing discourses of vulnerability and support needs on the one hand, and high achievement and employability on the other hand (Karram 2013; Lomer 2018). Strikingly, in an analysis of 16 English policy documents, Brooks found that international students were seldom represented as learners. 'Moreover, in the vast majority of texts, references to liberal goals such as 'analytical and critical thinking' are wholly absent' (Brooks2018, p. 752).

Such discourses are momentous in that they not only shape the rationale and configuration of education policies but also offer limited available subject positions and identity aspects (Koehne 2005; Klaus 2020). Whether or not refugees are conceptually framed as a part of the internationalisation of higher education often seems to be more related to authors' (implicit) presuppositions than to the actual investigation of practices and understandings within the field of higher education. Although general interest in the topic is growing, little research has been conducted to examine how refugee students are being constructed by members of their host countries or the receiving HEOs. Among the few exceptions are Anderson's (2019) study of media representations of international and refugee students in Canada and Ergin's (2016) study of the perspectives of Turkish students regarding their co-students who experienced forced migration. Generally, discourses on refugee students seem to focus on deficit and need, or, when more positively framed, on the great support they receive, while international students seem to be framed as an asset

to the host society, e.g., through contributing to labour markets and promoting intercultural experiences with domestic students. It also appears that discourses on international students are more nuanced and include topics such as ‘the student services discourse of support and care’ (Karram 2013, p. 12). These discourses may also question the actual value of international students as migrants (Lomer 2018; Anderson 2019).

6.4 Theoretical framework

In order to combine the analysis of organisational structural development and organisational discourse, I analysed interviews with first contacts for refugees and heads of international offices based on a systems theoretical framework (Luhmann 1970). In the field of higher education studies, Luhmann’s system theory offers concepts by which to analyse (self-) representations and the position of higher education and HEOs within society (Stichweh 2014; Schimank 2012; Nägler 2019; Hamann et al. 2017). While it is widely acknowledged in the German context, it has only recently started to gain international attention (Luhmann 2018 [2011]). Instead of focussing on socio-political implications (Webb et al. 2019, p. 208) or organisational change (Mahoney and Thelen 2010), function-structuralist systems theory centres on communicative adaptability. It provides the framework to investigate communicative acts and their structural consequences, but also structural factors that limit the reception of communication along the lines of expectations and existing organisational settings and routines. This focus allows a structural description and analysis of organisational decision making and structural development which is based on actual communication and structural connections rather than on presumed processes. Due to its approaches to both organisational theory (Luhmann 2018 [2011]) and discourse analysis (Luhmann 1980), systems theory provides the ideal framework to analyse the interplay of organisational discourse and structure development and thus seems the appropriate choice regarding my research questions. This is currently missing in much of the scholarship on refugees in higher education. Previous studies have used neo-institutionalist frameworks to look into support measures for refugee students (Webb et al. 2019; Beigang 2021). By applying a systems theoretical framework, I aim to expand the understanding of the organisational contexts that determine and shape the situation of refugees in higher education and introduce a new application of systems theory in higher education studies.

Systems theory understands society as a system consisting of a set of sub-systems. In this paper, I look at HEOs as organisational systems. They include a number of sub-

systems, such as internationalisation offices or matriculation offices. Systems are primarily constituted by communication and communicative expectations (Luhmann 2018 [2011], p. 68). It should be noted that systems theory uses the term communication rather broadly, referring to all actions or operations. Each system creates a self-description that refers to its specific purpose and forms a number of communicative expectations. By this definition, a family, a political party and HEOs are systems with different goals and expectations. HEOs as well as their sub-units each have defined roles and include a set of communicative expectations for valid or relevant actions and information that are understood to be part of the organisation or organisational unit – or, in other words, the system or sub-system. Instead of being reduced to one specific role, people may be members of numerous of systems. For example, a mother can be politically active while also teaching in higher education. Each of the systems she is included in requires different methods of communication from her and, in turn, she will expect different communications from the system-members in each of these separate systems.

Systems theoretical discourse analysis calls for a correlation between social knowledge and social structures (Luhmann 1980, p. 15). In this paper, support structures for refugee students at HEOs include all positions, communications, expenses and support measures that relate to refugee students. According to Luhmann, semantics define the boundaries of meaning ('Sinn') to avoid arbitrariness. The entirety of all social expectations and boundaries that define possible meanings are summed up as a society's semantics. In his study of the influence of discourses on universities' representations and public profiles, Nägler (2019) pointed out that universities' semantics can refer and relate to various regional and global contexts. Thus, meaning is both system and context-dependent. Discourses are systems that produce highly specific semantics (Stichweh 2000). For example, the discourse of refugee students within HEOs consists of all communications that can be identified as relating to refugee students. The discourse produces underlying semantics that define what is thinkable, knowable and doable, or in short, what is communicable with regards to refugee students. This discourse-producing system is closely intertwined with the organisational system and its sub-units, or more precisely, with all the structures and processes that are related to refugee students (Berg n.d.). In this context, I presume all representations of refugee students in the context of HEOs to be part of the organisational discourse on refugee students. The boundaries of this discourse are shaped by the boundaries of the organisation. Discourse includes all possible communications

regarding refugee students in the context of higher education. My interview analysis focuses on actors that were involved in the planning and realisation of programmes for refugee students and on those that can provide insights to the perspective of key actors in the field.

6.5 Data and methods

This paper is based on selected data from 25 interviews with practitioners at eight German HEOs. They are part of a research project on organisational responses to the refugee influx in German higher education that I have been working on since spring 2017.

Between summer 2017 and summer 2018, I conducted expert interviews (Bogner et al. 2002) with ten first contacts for refugees¹⁰ and eight heads of international offices at four public universities and four public universities of applied sciences (T1). The sampling criteria were: a) existing offers for refugee students, b) regional distribution in Germany, c) the main focus of strategy papers and mission statements and d) the availability of at least two interviews (first contact and head of international office) per HEO. In order to cover different areas and socioeconomic contexts, the sampled HEOs are located in seven different states, in cities of different sizes and spread throughout Germany. Further, it should be noted that two universities and two universities of applied sciences were primarily focused on research in their mission statements, while the other four HEOs emphasized equity and inclusion, as researchers have argued that perspectives and strategies can vary between teaching and research-oriented HEOs (Bolsmann and Miller 2008). All HEOs in the sample had received public funding from either federal or state-level funding schemes in order to establish their offers for refugee students.

The interviewees were sampled as experts based on their central positions in planning, realising, and thus shaping, support for refugee students. First, first contacts work directly with refugee students and are often in charge of developing and/or coordinating support programmes. Second, heads of international offices are involved in the strategic planning and execution of organisational internationalisation goals.

¹⁰ In the context of support programs for refugees, all sampled HEOs established positions in charge of counselling and often also coordinating support programs for refugees. In summary, I refer to those positions as first contacts.

The interview guidelines covered a number of topics, including support for refugee students, challenges for refugees in entering and obtaining higher education in Germany and the initiation and establishment of (at the time) newly created offers to support them. I also asked about interviewees' perceptions of refugee students in the context of the internationalisation of German higher education.

In late 2019 and early 2020 (T2), I conducted follow-up interviews with one first contact at seven of the sampled HEOs. During these interviews, I focussed on the further development and potential continuation of the programmes for refugee students. The first contact had changed at two of the HEOs. I therefore conducted follow-up interviews with new interview partners at these two HEOs. These interviews are also included in the analysis; however, though both new interview partners allowed for recording, transcription and analysis of the interviews, they did not give their permission to be quoted word-for-word.

In order to analyse the interdependence of organisational discourses on refugee students and the creation and development of support structures, I pre-coded all interviews and focussed on segments referring to the initiation and development of support offers and the practitioners' perspectives on refugee students. As a next step, I wrote case descriptions that allowed for a comparative analysis of programme development as well as underlying discourses as they were described by each interviewee. I specifically focussed on how they argued for the relevance of offers for refugees in general and also the need for specific offers in relation to the skills and needs of refugee students. Finally, I compared my results with the phrasing of the calls for applications for federal funding from the original funding phase (2017-2019) and the recent follow-up phase.

6.6 Results

6.6.1 From international students to refugee students

Before 2015, refugee students were not formally differentiated from other international students with no experience of forced migration. Regardless of their legal status, they could apply and enrol to study in Germany as long as they fulfilled regular access criteria, including meeting language proficiency requirements, completing a university entrance certificate and meeting subject and HEO-specific criteria.

Based on an emerging discourse of the desirability of support for refugee students, newly available federal and state-level funding schemes, an increase in counselling

requests from refugee students and the initial decentral activities of staff members, many German HEOs began to initiate support for refugee students.

In this context, refugee students needed to be differentiated from other international students in order to become formally addressable by HEOs. Thereby, supporting them became a communicative expectation, or in other words, an expectable and thus valid communication which allowed the formalisation of respective support structures. It was accompanied by a newly-emerging organisational discourse on refugee students that is constituted by defining them as a target-group and ascribing them with specific characteristics (Berg n.d.), which will be discussed in more detail throughout this section. This discourse appeared to have two main functions: To identify the need for support and to legitimize support for a relatively small group. Primarily, the presumed needs had to first be identified in order to develop appropriate support structures. This main discursive function shaped the discourse's strong deficit-orientation: Assumptions about refugee students' needs and vulnerabilities became central to mapping out specific support structures and thus to how they were perceived and described by HEO-members.

'And it really is about, what does one need to study? What is teamwork? What is project work? [...] That independent work is different here than from what they probably know from university. In case they already studied at their homeland-universities. [...] And we also have additional workshops that aim at independent learning.' (Head International Office, University of Applied Sciences 4, T1, (all interview quotes translated from German by the author)

The above quote emphasises a presumed unfamiliarity with German academic practices, knowledge and skills that recurred throughout the interviews and seems to have centrally shaped support programmes for refugee students in Germany. Strikingly, this presumption was even made regarding those refugee students that already had German study experiences. Such attributions can be seen as eliminating students' capacity to adapt and reinforcing cultural or national stereotypes. As Koehne has argued: 'Essentialising the language and skill levels of students as a group, such as South East Asian, is shown to be unsubstantiated. Stereotyping assumptions lead to the danger of dealing with students as racial groups.' (2005, p. 104).

This focus on refugees' needs was also part of another function of the emerging discourse, which was to justify the support for refugee students. On the one hand, this was done by emphasizing their great need in contrast to an ideal study situation (Berg, 2020).

On the other hand, refugees were framed as a new group of motivated students that benefitted HEOs by diversifying and internationalising the student body (Berg n.d.). This contributed to a nuanced discourse portraying refugee students as both beneficiaries of and contributors to an enhanced academic experience. Similar implications have also been described in relation to international students, who are, for example, frequently discussed as a potential asset to the German labour market (Schäfer and Henn 2020). However, even though refugee students were referred to in part within the context of HEOs' internationalisation, it was clearly stated by a number of interviewees that they differed from other groups of international students. While the focus of support for refugee students was clearly on their inclusion in higher education, arguments for differentiation from other international students referred to refugees' everyday living situations and the circumstances of their migration. The emphasis on such differences eventually implied that in order to meet the specific needs of this group, specialised personnel and programmes were needed.

'Yes, so we compared this. And this is a much bigger challenge for us. [I: In comparison to whom?] So, we, in comparison to Chinese students, who are just here. We also have a group of Russian students. It is not at all comparable to them. There, the study discipline is outstanding. And with the Chinese, there is the problem that, I think, exists globally —the isolation. But there we do not have that many subject-specific problems. And also, for German language exams, they study and they come and they somehow make it.' (Head International Office, University of Applied Sciences 2, T1)

'I think the two main differences are that firstly they have just been ripped away. There was no decision to come to Germany, but they had certain reasons why they had to leave their country and flee and suddenly found themselves in a new country. [...] That means it was in fact no decision. They are completely at the mercy of their new situation, which they can only limitedly influence.[...]. Of course, many of them do not have their credentials here, have the entire background- no documents and still have to manage to be recognised here.' (Head International Office, University 1, T1)

As illustrated in the above quotes, refugees are argumentatively differentiated from other international students. Their level of skill and preparation for German higher education is questioned, even explicitly, in comparison to other groups of international students. At the same time, their skills, discipline and potential achievements are portrayed as indeterminable, which seems to reflect practitioners' insecurities about dealing with a new

group of students. Yet, it also underscores how categorising international students into sub-groups can still produce generalisations. Moreover, refugee students are represented as passive and ‘completely at the mercy of their new situation’ (Head international office, University 1, T1). Instead of competing or diverse representations, the representation of refugee students is mainly characterised by prevalence of deficit as a leading topic of discourse. This seems to be reinforced by the objective to identify refugee students’ needs and develop support structures. In his analysis of Canadian media representations of international and refugee students, Anderson (2019) found similar differences between the more nuanced representation of international students, which ranges from attributions of high academic achievements and monetary benefit to a focus on their support needs, and the reductive representation of refugee students, which focussed on needs and welfare.

Even though all T1-interviewees recognized the need to support refugee students and generally agreed that their situation differed from those of other international students, some argued that it would be in the best interest of refugee students to quickly become ‘regular’ international students in order to avoid isolation, discrimination and stigmatisation. Further, as the following quote illustrates, the interviewees identified a number of support needs that were not specific to refugee students, hinting at the need for more general support structures and partly questioning the newly established differentiation:

‘On the other hand, we have the discussion at our university that this does not only concern refugees, but it has an aspect for all internationals [...]. Because they all have cultural issues, language issues, contextual communication issues. This is present everywhere. But you can break it down even further. It is not different with German students, too. We increasingly notice that they have great deficit when they enter university after school. And thus, this question is a huge topic for us right now. Whether we should do it and then at what level do we indeed only do it for a certain target group. Or should we really do it for all?’ (Head International Office, University 1, T1)

6.6.2 From refugee students to international students

In late 2019 and early 2020, I conducted follow-up interviews with first contacts at seven of the sampled HEOs. The situation had changed significantly in comparison to previous interviews. Due to the time-limit of federal or state-level funding schemes that HEO programming for refugee students was based on, support was realised in the context of

fixed-term projects in all sampled cases. For federal funding, the call for applications for a new Integra funding period had changed compared to the first one that read: 'The measures' focus is the support of subject-specific and linguistic preparation at study preparation colleges and higher education institutions' (DAAD 2016, translated from German by the author). By comparison, the latest call for applications describes fundable activities as follows:

'The demand for study preparation courses is still given, but the increasing transition to studies creates new needs for support. Thus, in addition to study-preparation, one focus of the measures lies on study-related language, subject, and methodology courses at higher education institutions. In order to meet the potential of optimal student support available for additional international students, the offers should be opened for regular international students based on a defined key. Based on the structural development and expansion of various measures, international students including refugees should be prepared for their career entry.' (DAAD 2019, translated from German by the author)

While the previous call for applications had exclusively addressed support for refugee students, notably, the new one includes 'regular' international students. While this differentiation somewhat underlines the exceptional position of refugee students, it is used in the context of reducing practical differentiations: Refugee students should be included in the same support programmes as all international students. This sentiment seems to increase throughout different study phases. The target group of study preparations is not specifically mentioned, but it can be assumed that it continues to mainly address refugees. Further, measures to support enrolled refugee students throughout their studies are to be opened to include other international students. And finally, refugees should be included in measures that are meant to support labour market access for all international students.

In their applications for the new funding phase, all interviewees described additional measures for enrolled international and refugee students. However, they still emphasized the specific need to support study preparation programming for refugee students.

'So especially considering study preparation offers, it would be nice if they could continue, I think. However, I would not like to create too many parallel structures for refugee students. Because this does not necessarily help the integration at the university location or the university community. Therefore, I actually think it is good

to increasingly make refugees aware of existing offers. Just to keep them in touch with other students of [University 3].’ (First Contact, University 3, T2)

How refugee students were addressed seemed to change throughout their educational biography: refugee applicants and prospective students should become international students and then regular applicants to the (German) labour market over time.

The above considerations are reflected in the further development of support programmes as they were described in follow-up interviews in December 2019 and January 2020. Of the seven HEOs that could be reached for follow-up interviews, six had applied for further funding. Those HEOs all emphasised an integration of offers for refugee students with those for all international students and planned to introduce additional support for enrolled students along with application training and other measures to promote labour market access. This appears to be a precaution, as no interviewee was aware of refugee students that had passed their preparatory support programmes and were now coming close to graduating. Considering the brief time frame since the establishment of the support structures, this is unsurprising.

Another aspect that shows the differentiation in dependence on the educational phase is the lack of data collection on enrolled refugee students. When public and academic interest in higher education for refugees increased, it was difficult to obtain knowledge on refugee students because German HEOs did not collect and certainly did not publish information on their students’ legal status (Streitwieser and Brück 2018). With the exception of maintaining some existing contacts, this has generally not changed at the HEOs in the sample. This was partly due to formal barriers, but it also did not appear to be a priority for some interviewees. If all international students are targeted by programming, there seems no need to explicitly identify refugee students.

‘This is something that is done here at the university anyway. I mean aside from my position and a few specific offers, we generally try to design those offers for all international students. [...] Meaning, always for the entire target group. And it has been like this from the beginning. Thus, it has not been pushed forward to identify them more. and thus we cannot keep track of how many refugees we have at the university.’ (First Contact, University 2, T2)

Relativizing differences between international students and refugee students resembled ideas and practices that they already had described in the T1 interviews. Though designed to address specific needs, the grouping of refugee students into a separate category could

unintentionally lead to their exclusion from social interaction and crucial aspects of student life. This reflects previous findings from interviews with refugee students about conflicts with their fellow international students (Grüttner et al. 2018, p. 126) and indicates unintended consequences of formal differentiations and support.

Consequently, throughout the follow-up interviews, first contacts that had applied for further funding welcomed the integration of programmes for refugee and international students and felt that this integration was in line with their perception of refugee students as international students with additional challenges and their motivation to quickly integrate them with the general student body.

‘So, in our new applications, it is always considered and in the German classes it has always been the case that refugees and non-refugees came together. Well, it was free for refugees and not for the others, but they always did it together. And we also never send anyone away from the math course, just because he had the wrong residence permit. Because the problems are the same. Just the finances were regulated differently back then, the financial resources. But now it is the case that the DAAD has also noticed this and international students are now allowed in most projects.’ (First Contact, University 2, T2)

One interview partner also mentioned the difficulty of engaging refugee students in programmes that were explicitly advertised as support for refugees:

‘Because they think to themselves, I do not want that, no idea, to be stigmatised or whatever. Or then it is said, yes, they receive so much support and we others do not. Therefore, we try to solve it this way, that it actually is open to everyone.’ (First Contact, University 2, T2)

It seems that the new call for applications strengthened previous perceptions of refugee students as international students and enforced strategies and programmes to develop in this direction. While only recently established as their own separate target group, HEO-members now appeared eager to make the differentiation of refugee students obsolete after their enrolment.

6.7 Discussion

The changing discourses on refugee students can be seen as an example of the interrelation of functional needs, organisational discourses and structure development. The discourse initially seemed to follow two main objectives: first, to identify refugees' needs in order to

create relevant support structures and second, to justify this support. The interviews from 2017 and 2018 show that with the introduction of service offers for refugees, refugee students became formally and discursively differentiated from other international students. with the functional need to justify support measures for this small group, which led to a strong focus on their (presumed) deficits and needs. At the same time, this very differentiation was perceived to put refugee students at risk of exclusion and potential stigmatisation. Thus, further on, this differentiation was relativized, and the discourse shifted towards describing and addressing refugee students as international students. This is reflected in a shift of support programmes from separate study preparation courses to inclusive support programmes for all enrolled international students (Beigang 2021).

Structural adaptations and discourses are closely enmeshed and dependent on one other. In addition to growing experiences with the newly established target group and the aim to quickly integrate refugee students, national funding conditions strongly influenced the development of organisational discourses and support structures. ‘Because we act according to DAAD requirements,[our support for refugee students] also changed of course’ (U4 E1 T2). However, those funding requirements are not an isolated external effect but are partly based on feedback from the field. As one interviewee points out:

‘I think it is an interplay with the DAAD. They also hear from the universities what is missing and what is requested. And it is of course clear that those that are enrolled now also need offers that probably do not exist. [...] And the DAAD notices this, and they include it in the applications, so this is an interplay.’ (First Contact, University 2, T2)

In conclusion, just as with the development of structures, discourses on refugee students are not only based on experiences with and perceptions of refugee students. They are also narrowed down to aspects that are relevant for and addressable by HEOs, reflecting and used to justify the current agenda of programme development efforts, as well as being interrelated with funding requirements. As systems of meaning-production, or rather, as systems that limit possibilities and thus define the boundaries of meaning regarding a specific topic (Luhmann 1980, p. 40), these discourses fulfil a specific function: They create knowledge about refugee students that is compatible with HEOs as organisational systems. They can thus result in, and also be reshaped by, corresponding structural developments.

Finally, it should be noted that the numerous factors that influence discourses on refugee students are based on perceived needs and do not necessarily reflect the actual needs of refugee students (Webb et al. 2019). Offers for refugee students were shaped by funding requirements, the extent of (perceived) organisational accountability and assumptions about refugee student needs. Especially during the initiation period of structural support offers, these ascribed needs were generally not based on real experiences with refugee students but merely on assumptions. This emphasises the importance of representation: the more familiar practitioners are with the diverse situations and needs of the students they are dealing with, the more they are able to establish fitting support structures. As Unangst and Crea (2020) have pointed out, successful programmes should allow an adaptable variety of offers in order to meet students' diverse needs.

6.8 Implications for further research

It seems imperative to triangulate research on policy, practice and the perspectives and situation of refugee students in order to analyse whether and how well the needs and potentials of refugee students are being met by services that are provided based on presumed needs. Further, the HEOs in this sample reported very different developments of the numbers of prospective refugee students willing to participate in their support programmes. In this rather small sample, no relation to the HEOs or the cities size could be determined except for a possible tendency for more demand in larger cities. One of the interview partners mentioned communication strategies as vital for contact with refugee students. Further analysis of the development of prospective refugee students' demand for support could provide fruitful insight into the reasons for such varying developments. Also, HEOs' communicative expectations are strongly shaped by national contexts. Germany is a wealthy nation that traditionally boasts tuition-free public higher education. It would be interesting to compare higher education for refugees internationally, especially when considering historical and cultural differences regarding public and private education, national wealth and different approaches to asylum policy. The Global South and neighbouring countries, who host the majority of forcefully displaced people worldwide, have been especially underrepresented in studies on higher education for refugees.

Another important aspect with regard to refugee students as domestic and/or international students is that international students are identified based on their foreign higher education entrance certificate. It will be an important follow-up question to identify and address the needs of refugee students who apply as domestic students with German

high school diplomas. And finally, in this context, the self-identification of refugee students poses an important follow-up question. Previous research has shown their need to construct, maintain and coordinate different and partly contradictory identities as refugees and students or online learners (Klaus 2020; Brunton et al. 2019; Farrell et al. 2020). In addition to the identity work, it would be important to look into the potential practical results of self-identification. For example whether the labelling of programme offers as being for refugee or for international students impacts how they are used by refugee students. Such research could further be used to critically compare the needs and features ascribed to refugee students by organisational discourse with self-identified needs and self-descriptions of refugee students. Systems theory could provide a helpful framework to identify organisational difficulties and chances in processing and using such self-descriptions in order to improve support structures to better fit their target group.

7 Support for prospective refugee students in Germany: Quo vadis?

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Abstract

Social engagement can be seen as a crucial part of the third mission of higher education organisations. One aspect of adopting social responsibility is supporting access to higher education for marginalised and underrepresented groups. This chapter describes the introduction and development of support structures for refugee students in Germany. It identifies the principal challenges for and influences on such structures and makes recommendations on how to support their continued existence.

Keywords

Refugee Students – Third Mission – Access to Higher Education

7.1 Introduction

Social responsibility has many facets within higher education: it can be realised in research topics, in promoting and facilitating innovation, in methods and content of teaching, but it also in ensuring access to knowledge and formal learning environments, meaning higher education organisations (HEOs¹¹). In recent years, access to higher education for refugees has become a priority for politicians and HEOs alike. Since the peak of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016, many German HEOs have implemented strategies to support refugees in entering higher education (Schammann & Younso, 2016; Schröder et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2018), in the majority of cases by addressing a group that had not been specifically supported or targeted in this context before 2015.

¹¹ My analysis was based on a systems theoretical framework. In order to investigate decision making and the initiation, formalisation and further development of support structures for refugees, I looked into universities and universities of applied sciences as organisations rather than institutions.

Based on a research project into support for refugee students in Germany, this chapter seeks to contribute to the discussion on social responsibility in higher education by discussing support for refugee students in the context of the HEOs' third mission and examining the organisational challenges faced in initiating, formalising and maintaining programmes for refugee students. Finally, it suggests how HEOs could be helped to maintain their support for refugee students.

7.2 Third Mission

Traditionally, the primary objectives of HEOs were understood to be teaching and research. An additional, third, mission has become increasingly important in recent decades: 'the dialogue between science and society' (Predazzi, 2012, p. 17). HEOs are expected to leave the safety of their ivory towers and engage with society in order 'to take a more visible role in stimulating and guiding the utilization of knowledge for social, cultural and economic development' (E3M, 2012, p. 5). This includes a broad range of activities in the areas of 'technology transfer and innovation, continuing education and social engagement' (E3M, 2012, p. 8). The latter may include research and output on relevant and critical topics, teaching strategies such as service learning (Berthold et al., 2010, p. 31), and community engagement. It may also include widening participation and critically questioning the status quo, as well as normative and hegemonic knowledge. HEOs are likely to approach their third mission in close connection to their first two missions, research and teaching (Henke et al., 2016, p. 14). Their engagement with refugee students can be seen as an example of this approach: the majority of support structures address study preparation, with current developments extending to support throughout their studies. This creates a 'mission overlap' (E3M, 2012, p. 8) between teaching and social responsibility, related to the internationalisation and diversification of the student body.

However, although a general expectation prevails that HEOs will fulfil their third mission, their first mission – research – carries the greatest incentives. With few exceptions, their ratings, reputation and funding are linked to their research performance and output and, to a lesser extent, to excellent teaching (Schneidewind, 2016). Social dimensions are underrepresented in devising university rankings (Nyssen, 2018). Based on a systems-theoretical understanding of HEOs as organisations, this chapter looks at the introduction and development of support for refugee students. It identifies changing focuses and practical concerns as well as the factors influencing the realisation and modification of

support structures for refugee students. Finally, it asks how HEOs may be supported in realising their third mission.

7.3 Data and methods

This chapter is based on 25 expert-interviews at eight German HEOs, including four universities and four universities of applied sciences, located in 7 different German states across the country. One university and one university of applied sciences are located in the same German city and cooperated in introducing a support programme for refugee students. The remaining HEOs are located in different areas. The HEOs were selected based on their regional distribution and emphasis on either internationalisation or diversification in their mission statements. In order to be included in the sample, they needed to offer support for refugee students.

Between summer 2017 and summer 2018, I conducted interviews with the head of the international offices and the counsellor for refugees, hereinafter referred to as the first contact, at each HEO. At two HEOs, two first contacts were interviewed. Additionally, I conducted follow-up interviews with the first contacts of seven of the sampled HEOs in late 2019 and early 2020. The timing of the interviews allows an insight into the early development (2017), adjustments and further development (2018) and late stages (2019/20) of the programmes. During the last interviews, the majority of HEOs were awaiting the outcomes of their funding applications for, often adapted, follow-up projects.

Building on a previous analysis of challenges for refugee students (Berg, 2018), the introduction and formalisation of the support offered at German HEOs (Berg et al., 2021) and organisational semantics on supporting refugees (Berg, 2021a), this chapter investigates the organisational challenges and factors influencing the realisation and maintenance of support structures, as well as the possibilities for supporting HEOs in order to ensure ongoing support for refugee students. Based on these research interests, a deductive coding scheme was developed and the follow-up interviews were partly transcribed with a focus on the changes in existing and plans, the plans for new programmes, the challenges in realising them, the aspects influencing the development and realisation of programmes, and structural factors, such as personnel, networks and resources. All interviews were coded according to those topics. For each HEO, a case description was written and, finally, those descriptions were compared in order to identify and generalize the central topics.

7.4 Higher education for refugees

In its fourth sustainable development goal, the United Nations (UN) aims to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ by 2030 (United Nations, 2019). However, in 2019 only 3% of refugees had access to higher education. By 2030, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aims to increase this number to 15% (UNHCR, 2019). UNHCR’s measures to support higher education for refugees include providing guidelines for countries and HEOs and information on scholarships for refugee students, such as the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, and the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), which offers scholarships for undergraduate refugee students. During recent years, the European Union has also increased its support for refugee students, for example by funding research as well as funding projects to support HEOs in integrating refugees through the Erasmus+ programme. In Germany, the peak of new asylum applications sparked a discussion on the importance of supporting refugees’ education, and also on the potential of refugees for the German labour market (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018). At the same time, many of the newly arrived refugees intended to start or pursue higher education and approximately one third were expected to hold the formal entrance qualifications (Brücker et al., 2016). In this context, the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) started funding schemes to support study preparation for refugees at German HEOs. Similar programmes were made available at a regional level in some states (‘Bundesländer’), leading to the formalisation of support programmes at HEOs throughout the country within a similar time-frame.

In German higher education, the authority for many decisions, such as admission criteria and procedures for individual study programmes or the eligibility of foreign documents lies primarily with individual HEOs. Thus, whether and how policy implications and guidelines are implemented depends directly on individual institutional policies.

However, it can generally be stated that, irrespective of their residence status, refugee students are formally treated in the same way as international students from countries outside the European Union. In most cases, that means that they can apply in the usual way as soon as they fulfil the admission criteria, which usually include language certificates and an entrance qualification. Students with credentials that do not meet the criteria for direct entrance have to take an assessment test (‘Feststellungsprüfung’).

Preparatory colleges ('Studienkollegs') offer courses for international students to help them prepare for this test (Grüttner et al., 2018). Before the refugee influx in 2015-2016, refugees were barely recognised or supported in the context of German higher education. Instead, they competed with all international students for a limited number of study places.

Generally, refugees face similar challenges to other international students, such as social isolation, financial challenges and lack of language proficiency. Due to the circumstances of forced migration, the rules and restrictions of the asylum procedure and their often precarious situations, they also face a number of additional challenges, such as trauma or psychological distress, gaps in their educational biography, missing documents or contradictory formal requirements from different organisations (Berg, 2018; Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018; Grüttner et al., 2018; Unangst & Streitwieser, 2018). Further, the processes and requirements of HEOs are built on organisational assumptions about typical students, which can create difficulties for those who do not fit these norms (Baker & Irwin, 2019).

7.5 First steps, experiences and structural changes: The development of support offers for refugee students

The interviews with HEO members offer an insight into what can be seen as four stages of programme initiation and development at German HEOs. These are preceded by the identification of a topic and a need to act which, in this case, was closely connected to the public discourse on educating refugees as well as to practical demands, such as a rapidly increasing number of counselling requests from prospective refugee students. This identification of a topic means that HEO members become aware of an issue and not only of the need to act, but the need to do so in the context of their HEO's mission and scope of action. Previous research has shown high levels of ambition to support refugees among HEO members at all hierarchical levels and has emphasized the importance of this engagement in establishing support structures (Webb et al., 2019). When asked about their reasons for supporting refugee students, HEO members often referred to internationalisation, diversification and a third mission or social responsibility and, from these points, referred to formal self-descriptions of their respective HEOs, such as internationalisation strategies or mission statements. Moreover, refugee students were seen as enriching the diversity and internationality of the student body and as potentially highly motivated new students (Berg, 2021a).

“As I said, those two aspects, this is just a, a not necessarily new group, but an increasingly important group. Precisely in this entire area of diversity of internationalisation. And in the area of social responsibility.” (U1E2, all quotes translated from German by JB)

This shows that the need to support refugee students is understood and communicated within the context of organisational goals and strategy papers which already exist. Although refugees are not specifically addressed by existing strategies, these are sufficiently vague to allow refugee students to be newly established as a target-group within their context. This is not merely understood as an act of kindness, but rationalised within the organisations aims and expected benefits. For example, some participants explicitly highlighted the potential, created by their current experiences with refugee students, to improve the support offered to all international students by raising awareness of their situation and needs (Berg, 2021a).

7.6 Four stages of programme initiation and development

Firstly, as previously mentioned, pioneers initiated decentral voluntary engagement. Academic and administrative staff from a range of hierarchical levels, as well as students, became active (Berg et al., 2021). Their engagement included initial networking, counselling refugees after hours, mentorship initiatives and social activities such as sports groups. Law students started refugee law clinics to provide legal counselling for refugees. The importance of these initial decentralised actions was emphasised throughout the interviews and demonstrates that people are crucial in providing these initial impulses and initiating direct action for HEOs’ social engagement. The principal challenges faced during that time were on the individual level, working extra hours or managing insecurities in how to address the specific issues of this target-group.

“In Summer 2015, many more people that had fled came to the university to get information. And nobody knew where to send them. Everybody felt that this was a completely new topic and, somehow, nobody felt it was their responsibility. Then the state announced that each university should name a contact for refugees [...] In summer 2015, that was sort of pushed on to my colleague [...], who welcomed the task. But it quickly became clear that it was too much, because he could not manage the number of people in addition to his regular job.” (U2T1E1)

Yeah, in the beginning it was resources. Because we had to see how to counsel all those people that turned up in our office. And yes, that was the main issue.”

(FH4T1E2)

Secondly, this first stage of engagement was followed by the formalisation of offers for refugee students (Berg, Gottburgsen & Kleimann, 2021; Berg, 2018; Iwers-Stelljes et al., 2016; Schammann & Younso, 2016, 2017): Early support offers focussed primarily on study preparation for refugees in order to facilitate their social and academic integration in German HEOs. The offers of support were typically based on needs ascribed to refugee students and were dependent on local factors, such as existing support or networks. They often included language classes and academic preparation courses. At all the HEOs in the sample, one or more first-contact positions were established, whose tasks included counselling, the coordination of all support for refugee students and the establishment and maintenance of relevant contact networks (Berg et al., 2021). Initial insecurities were often due to a lack of experience with this specific topic and thus raised questions about how to realise target-group-specific support with little or no official recommendations or guidance. Further challenges were often of a practical nature, such as finding a sufficient number of competent German-language-teachers (UNESCO, 2018) or access to infrastructural resources, such as rooms. Another issue was the lack of information about the efficacy of such study preparation programmes. There is overall no information available on how many refugees successfully apply to German HEOs: apart from in the organisation of specific support structures, German HEOs do not collect data on their students' residence status (Streitwieser & Brück, 2018). Moreover, HEO-members in direct contact with refugees often emphasised that refugees face challenges that cannot directly be addressed by the HEOs themselves, such as poor accommodation or constraints on their movement. The interviewees also expressed concern about excluding refugees from other student groups by establishing exclusive offers of support.

“Because they could not afford to buy tickets. [...] We found no solution. [...] So, they get welfare money, sure. But the money would not be enough for such things.” (FH3T1E1)

“The tendency was, we wanted to make it possible for them to get out of this label, as I were. So that at some point they could build a life as regular international students instead.” (FH1T1E1)

Thirdly, interviews conducted in 2018 showed the adaption and stabilisation of offers for refugees (Berg, 2021a): depending on their experiences and feedback, many HEOs adapted their offers of support. Changes included, for example, revising the times at which support was available, in reaction to the absence of participants due to overlapping asylum-related appointments, family obligations or religious traditions, such as Ramadan. Generally, the established offers were understood to function well. They principally included language and academic courses, counselling and mentoring as well as HEO-specific individual support, such as business networks to support internships. Voluntary projects supplemented the formalised support structures, but often for a limited period of time. Generally, student engagement appeared to decrease. Some HEOs tried to maintain engagement by creating paid positions or the opportunity to collect study credits for intercultural engagement.

“And so we did not develop a general strategy, but watched a little. And, during the last two years, it became more and more clear: what are the actual needs? Where are the needs and related to this, we developed structures.” (FH1T1E1)

“And we arranged it so that students who wanted to become involved could also attend an accompanying seminar, in order to be a little more trained for this whole situation. And they have the opportunity to collect credit points with it. And this has been very well received; we just had a semester with over 100 students and refugees.” (FH1T1E1)

In individual cases, support offers were reduced due to low demand. The principal insecurities were around whether the necessary funding could be secured to maintain support offers for refugees after 2019. Moreover, personnel changes at some HEOs increased insecurities about the future of the programmes and diverted attention to re-organisation, instead of further developing support for refugees.

“And we ask ourselves internally whether we will have enough participants, even for the language classes. Before, the situation was always: Oh God! We cannot find a slot for all of them! We have to turn so many away. Where are they going to find something? And this was the situation until just half a year ago. And now, suddenly, it’s, oh! Will we even manage to fill those two classes?” (FH1T1E2)

“We had a project with sport sciences, which was over after half a year because the person was gone again. It is always person-dependent.” (U2T2E1)

Finally, the follow-up interviews in late 2019 and early 2020 were conducted after or during the last stages of these programmes, in the sense that funding periods were about to end or, in one case, had just ended. Those HEOs that had applied for further funding had mostly included changes to their programmes in their applications for follow-up projects. The interviews therefore show a phase of structural changes and the diversification of further developments of offers for refugee students: Different HEOs experienced very different levels of demand. While at some locations the numbers of requests and applications were either ‘slightly increasing’ (U3T2E1) or remained ‘relatively stable’ (U2T2E1), at some others they ‘very distinctly’ (U4T2E1) decreased. This reduced demand was one cause for reduced offer of support. All interview partners describe how support programmes for refugees had path-dependently been further adapted. Examples include the increasing use of social media at a university that already had a strong focus on information and contact with the target-group, and an increased tendency to include support for refugee students with that offered to all international students. A number of factors provided the orientation and inspiration to adjust the programmes. Exchanges and networks prove to be important opportunities for reflection, including experiences with and feedback from refugee students, from internal network partners, such as teachers or study counsellors, as well as from external network partners, such as exchanges with and reports of the experiences of other HEOs. Funding requirements are another crucial factor: federal and state-level calls for funding applications are said to have shifted their focus from study preparation to study accompaniment and preparations for entering the German labour market. Furthermore, support offers for refugee students were to be opened up to, or integrated with, offers for all international students, which was mostly welcomed by the first contacts because it reflected their previous thoughts.

Two general developments emerged: the majority of HEOs in the sample had applied for funding for further programmes. Plans for the continuation of refugee support were always dependent on the outcomes of those applications. In most cases, the focus of these follow-up projects was supposed to shift: study preparation should continue but, additionally, support should be developed and added in finding internships; training for the labour market and job applications; and subject-specific language classes. Mostly, the support offers for refugee students and other international students were to be integrated.

The main insecurities were the imminent termination of project funding and uncertainty about open funding applications. In addition, personnel changes brought difficulties in transferring experience and knowledge. Frequently, a new first contact would start after the previous one had already left, causing them to duplicate previous work collecting information and establishing routines. Moreover, impressions of the success of programmes for refugee students were principally based on direct contact with the target-group with a continued absence of any evidence-based overview, due to a lack of data collection. The majority of first contacts did not see this evidence as crucial for their work, but the question of how to measure the success of programmes remained, particularly if those programs were not intended solely as HEO-specific study preparation, but also as general support for refugees' social integration.

“And a new thing is labour market orientation. That was really important to the DAAD in the new call for applications, that additional measures are taken to help refugees prepare for the German labour market.” (U4T2E1)

“Mainly based on exchange. So, there are conferences where such topics [possible programme adaptations] are centrally discussed. But there are also smaller rounds. Here in [state] there are regular meetings with other contacts for refugees from other universities and universities of applied sciences and we frequently talk about such topics. But, also, in contact with student counselling for example. They can also give feedback on such things, that certain tasks create difficulties, and then we naturally include this in such applications.” (U2T2E1)

“We have our own notion of what one needs to study, and, of course, there is feedback from refugees, what is missing, what they need, what could be done. So, it is a combination of what we believe is good and what we can somehow offer, of our capacities and what needs are announced by the refugees. And, of course, from professors.” (U4T2E1)

The second general development to emerge is typified by one HEO, which had not applied for further funding, primarily due to a marked decrease in requests and course-participants. At the time of the follow-up interview, no first contact position was officially in place. The previous first contact had principally been responsible for documenting the project. All support offers for international and domestic students remained open to refugee students, but no specific courses, counselling or project-management were now offered. This also

affected communication structures: external networks would not be followed-up and no internal position now existed to bring together all the relevant information and experience for this target group. This demonstrates the importance of a first contact position for maintaining target-group specific knowledge and networks.

7.7 Support for refugee students as part of the Third Mission

The analysis of the introduction, formalisation and further development of support for refugee students in German higher education indicated three crucial points for understanding social engagement as part of an HEO's third mission. Firstly, the term is vague. Although HEOs generally acknowledge their social responsibilities and refer to social engagement in their self-descriptions and mission statements, the practical meaning remains unclear. There needs to be an event or prompt to initiate specific projects or activities. In this case, public expectations, pioneer activity and available funding brought about the introduction of projects for refugees. There are no self-evident topics or actions in social responsibility, but expectations have to be communicated and prioritised. Secondly, personnel are crucial in identifying important areas and inspiring and initiating practical engagement. However, in order to be maintained, those impulses have to be formalised, which usually requires the acceptance or support of the HEO's management. Thirdly, HEOs need incentives and resources which emphasize the importance and support the realisation of social engagement. Then, the third mission could become the first mission, influencing and improving research and teaching (Schneidewind, 2016).

The study participants most commonly discussed support for refugee students in the context of internationalisation, diversification and the third mission or social responsibility. At some HEOs, the contact between international offices and diversity management increased significantly as a result of their common engagement with refugees. This could offer an opportunity to link these topics more closely and increase cooperation between the respective offices. If the internationalisation of higher education is understood as 'the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society' (de Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015, p. 29; p. 281), refugees and asylum seekers offer the chance to widen the scope of this process. This could lead to increased diversity within HEOs and society, and gives the opportunity to establish support structures that could be used for a variety of marginalised or non-traditional groups

of (prospective) students. Since the presence of international students does not automatically mean internationalisation (Knight, 2011), it seems important to focus sustainable programmes on supporting both their social and academic integration. Furthermore, the experiences with refugee students offer possibilities to apply lessons learned from these programmes to other groups. This knowledge should, therefore, be seen as an organisational resource and be reprocessed accordingly.

7.8 Quo vadis? Implications for supporting HEOs' engagement with refugee students

Based on rising interest in study preparation, the engagement of pioneers and the funding made available by federal and local programmes, German HEOs initiated a variety of support structures for prospective students with the experience of forced migration. The majority of HEOs in the sample started such support programmes in 2015 or 2016, based on existing offers for international students plus additional, more or less improvised, measures. During the different stages of introducing and developing a support offer for refugee students, HEO members faced a variety of challenges from initial insecurities about how to support this specific target group with little available guidance, to adjustments of the programmes based on experience. They gained confidence in how to support refugee students, but the future of the programmes, and their funding, remain uncertain.

It can be expected that the landscape of refugee support will grow increasingly diverse, addressing combined questions of social integration, diversification, study preparation and internationalisation. This may present an opportunity to rethink internationalisation strategies, and to combine strategies of internationalisation and diversification in order to meet the third mission of social responsibility, thus resulting in cross-department engagement. The development of offers for refugees has shown the potential and importance of individual personnel in identifying and initially addressing important topics. In order to formalise and establish support for refugees, and other marginalised groups, HEOs and their staff members could be supported on several levels. The following measures could help to establish ongoing, target-group-specific support structures at HEOs:

Personnel: A position formally in charge of counselling, networking and the administration of offers for refugees was repeatedly emphasised as crucial to programmes for refugees. This position concentrates personal and organisational knowledge in one place. In order to be able to offer more diverse projects, more than one position was

understood to be ideal. In this context, additional funding should allow time for hand-overs and training new personnel in the event of personnel changes. Additionally, paid student positions may increase student engagement and potentially leads to more peer-contact for refugee students. In order to realise support offers for refugees, qualified personnel, such as German-language-teachers, are crucial. Relevant training and professional development should be offered.

External networks: Many issues cannot be addressed by HEOs, including the majority of issues relating to the living and learning conditions of refugees or the requirements of the asylum regime and welfare state (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018), and also the question of whether refugees are informed of the possibility of higher education. Therefore, it seems elementary to keep crucial official and voluntary figures informed about the possibility of higher education, to find policy solutions to minimise legal insecurities (Schammann & Younso, 2016) and to offer practical solutions to the remaining challenges, such as the recognition of foreign degrees.

Orientation and Information: Although initial insecurities were overcome and support offers for refugee students were stabilised, it seems essential to document the experiences with refugee students and successful support programmes and share this information with all HEOs, inspiring adjustments of individual programmes and benefiting further programmes or other target-groups.

Funding: The majority of the elements listed above depend on funding. Project-specific funding should include personnel, relevant courses and activities such as public relations, as well as funding for time-limited additional measures. HEOs should be thoroughly informed about funding possibilities. While the project-specific time limit of funding schemes can allow regular adjustments, project deadlines also cause insecurities. HEOs' applications for further or new funding should be answered promptly and well before the ending of previous funding periods.

Incentives: In order to emphasise the importance of social engagement, it should become a factor in university rankings.

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