

# At the Margins

It's easy to overlook the marginalized. Social exclusion can have very different causes and consequences – also in the context of migration. Six Max Planck Institutes have now joined forces for a cross-institute project focusing on the topic. The project examines, among other things, the question of why immigrants often lose their good health. It explores what prompts Somalis to move from Europe to Kenya, and what consequences the deal between the EU and Turkey might have for the rights of asylum seekers in Greece. Their common aim is to uncover exclusion and develop fair rules to regulate migration.

INTERVIEW AND TEXT **MECHTHILD ZIMMERMANN**



Two worlds: In the Hessian town of Marburg, it's not merely a fence that separates life in the tented accommodations from that in the surrounding houses. The asylum seekers housed there are excluded from much more: they aren't allowed to work or to leave the state of Hesse.



# “The Other Side of the Coin”

Marie-Claire Foblets from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology on the objectives of the research initiative on exclusion

Against the backdrop of the refugee crisis in the spring of 2015, the Max Planck Society launched a research initiative to investigate the issue of migration. The concept: several institutes already active in the field pool their expertise in order to gain new insights into a subject that is of great significance to our society. Marie-Claire Foblets coordinates the project in collaboration with Ayelet Shachar and Steven Vertovec from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity.

*Integration is the greatest challenge facing society today. Why aren't you and your colleagues conducting research in that field, Prof. Foblets?*

**Marie-Claire Foblets:** Integration is indeed a very important topic. It would be an obvious area to research. However, we made a conscious decision to start by surveying the landscape of ongoing scientific research in the broad field of migration and came across a considerable number of projects dealing with integration. One aspect that is often overlooked, however, is that the focus on integration also excludes or marginalizes people.

*What is it about exclusion that particularly interests you?*

Exclusion is never entirely preventable. Every human society defines who belongs to it and who doesn't. Nevertheless, integration and exclusion are two sides of the same coin – they don't preclude one another. For instance, immigrants from outside the EU have been af-

forded limited political rights here, but this doesn't mean that they can't be well connected here in Germany. Some of them are highly skilled but are still granted only a temporary residence permit. Time also plays a role. Our aim is to better understand the mechanisms and dynamics of exclusion.

*Is exclusion primarily the result of state regulations?*

The state is an important player. It determines what rights and obligations immigrants have, and the areas from which they are excluded. As a result, legal status is a key focus of our initiative. We are scrutinizing the criteria that guide decisions on exclusion and integration and to what extent these decisions are – or are not – implemented. What about respect for human rights? Are the criteria for this clearly defined, or is there room for discretion in individual cases? Is there a risk that decisions will be made on a whim?

Of course, an individual's socioeconomic status – their chances on the labor market, living arrangements, education, local connections and familiarity with German society – also plays a crucial role. Here in Europe, an individual's socioeconomic status is a decisive factor for the recognition they are afforded. Those who are ill or traumatized, and therefore most in need of protection, are at risk of being marginalized. Yet even recognized refugees who, from a legal perspective, are placed on nearly equal footing with domestic citizens can often feel excluded from society.

*Why is that?*

There are emotional communities in every society. These are groups that people feel associated with. One's sense of belonging is defined by a variety of informal criteria and unwritten rules, such as behavior, values, languages, religion and much more. Those who didn't grow up here and who have yet to internalize these aspects may find it difficult to find their place.

*Isn't it simply a question of time before someone who recently immigrated learns these rules?*

Time plays an important role. However, exclusion can persist for an astonishingly long time. A subproject of the MPI for Human Development looks at two examples from history. One concerns the integration of displaced Germans after 1945: it took more than a generation for them to feel accepted as part of the local population and develop a sense of belonging. The second example concerns refugees who were violently expelled from Pakistan following the partition of India in 1947. Here, too, it took decades for them to be integrated into their new home in India.

*Some migrant communities can sometimes give the impression that they don't want to integrate and would rather stay among themselves.*

That can happen, too. But that can be explained, in part, as a reaction to past instances of marginalization. People who are or feel excluded develop a demeanor that enables them to deal with this. A per-

son who fails to receive the requisite level of social recognition in society can either keep trying and getting involved until they succeed or give up and join a different emotional community. Someone who isn't legally recognized as an asylum seeker can resort to court action and can often cite valid reasons against their deportation – or they can go into hiding in hopes of protecting themselves.

*The latter option isn't exactly in line with the law ...*

...but it is a consequence that can't be ignored. This is another area that our research initiative will address. Legal provisions and regulations are there for people to make use of. If they offer no prospects, then for some people, the risk of being deported is so daunting that they will do everything they can to prevent it from happening. We should put ourselves in their position and consider how we would behave in such a situation.

*The treatment of refugees varies considerably in Germany and depends to a great extent on the regional authorities responsible for the case. Measures range from issuing work permits to deportation.*

Regulations and the application of laws actually differ greatly between the different German states. Putting refugees in a position that obliges them to live with major uncertainty for long periods can be particularly problematic. Living in limbo is a great burden. People don't know whether it's worth making new social contacts, learning the local language or



"One of the strengths of our joint project is that the individual teams can benefit from one another's data, knowledge and expertise," says Marie-Claire Foblets.

trying their utmost to find a job if everything they work so hard to build up might last for only a few weeks or months.

*The topic of migration was one of the main bones of contention in the negotiations to establish a new federal government here in Germany. Can't our politicians do more to support these newcomers, for instance by proposing a new Immigration Act?*

Our primary task is basic research, not political consultancy. This means that we gather insights – specifically concerning the mechanisms of exclusion and migration and how they interact. One of the

strengths of our joint project is that the individual teams can benefit from one another's data, knowledge and expertise. The expectation is that, by compiling these results, we will be able to create an overall picture and more clearly identify the deficits and contradictions in the current system. Academic freedom affords us the opportunity to work independently of political concepts and electoral considerations. On this basis, we certainly intend to develop alternatives to existing regulations that may prove relevant for policy making. But to do that, we need time to collect and then analyze the necessary data.

# A Return or a New Start?

Somali refugees aren't migrating solely from Africa to Europe – some are moving in the opposite direction. A project at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle is investigating the motives behind this and exploring the implications.

Since the central government of Somalia collapsed in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee the military conflicts

waged between warlords, clans and an array of militias. The majority fled to neighboring countries such as Kenya. Those who could fled further to Europe, North America and the Arab countries.

For some time, however, there has been an opposite trend, as Tabea Scharrer from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle has observed: some Somalis are relocating from Europe back to East Africa, including to Kenya. There are already a good number of Somalis living in Kenyan cities – some are Kenyan citizens, while others are Somali refugees, many of whom have lived in Kenya for decades now. In addition, Somali returnee families are also settling there, coming primarily from Western countries, but also from Arab states.

In the context of East Africa, these returnee families belong to the middle and upper classes – either hailing from well-off families or having established themselves economically outside of Africa. The majority of them have also gained citizenship in the countries where they have lived for many years. Many families are moving to East Africa because the parental generation – those who first migrated to Europe – fear that their children would be too heavily influenced by life in the West. But there are also young people who grew up and completed vocational training outside of Africa and who are now seeking to settle in Kenya.

It is this phenomenon that Tabea Scharrer aims to investigate more closely. One of the project's key questions is what compels people to "return" from Europe to East Africa. Exclusion could play an important role: Did they not feel at home in Europe? Did their children experience discrimination at school? Was it too difficult to find their place in society? And how are the returnees managing in East Africa? Do they find it easier to settle in there?

Back in Mombasa: Buildings like these house middle-class Somalis who moved from Europe to Kenya.



Another issue is the potential impact returnees could have on Somali society in Kenya. It is often observed among Somalis that ethnicity plays a major role for identification processes. The perceived difficulty in maintaining their own culture in Western countries is the primary motivation in some Somalis' decision to leave Europe. In

Kenya, they could further reinforce certain values of Somali society; this may also explain the striking tendency of Somalis to distance themselves from other segments of the Kenyan population.

For Tabea Scharrer, however, contrasting developments are also possible: the time spent away from Somali soci-

ety in East Africa could also engender a cosmopolitan lifestyle – primarily among the returnees' children, many of whom would have preferred to remain in Europe or North America. Their experiences with migration and life in other societies could also lead to Somali society in Kenya becoming more open and diverse. ◀

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## What Laws Apply in the Greek Migration Hotspots?

The EU has established refugee camps on numerous Greek islands, applying its own admission conditions and procedures. A research project at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg is examining whether these regulations are in line with the legal principles and how they are implemented in practice.

**W**hen increasing numbers of people fled across the Mediterranean to Europe in 2015, the European Commission reacted by establishing “hotspots” in Italy and Greece. These camps, which were conceived as an emergency measure, were intended to allow refugees to find shelter, register with authorities and submit applications for asylum. Since then, however, these hotspots have become permanent institutions.

In March 2016, the EU made a deal with Turkey whereby migrants who travel illegally from Turkey to Greece were to be returned. The hotspots on the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos are now de facto deportation camps. Catharina Ziebritzki of the

Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law and Robert Nestler of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology are currently investigating the situation of refugees in these camps. The processes and acceptance conditions applied there contravene various Greek laws, EU standards and international conventions.

As a result, the living conditions in the camps fall below the minimum levels specified by the EU itself. The accommodations are overcrowded, and the vast majority aren't winter-proof. Medical provision is poor, as is the security situation. Contrary to the original intention, most refugees spend several months there, and some even more than a year.

In actual fact, an accelerated asylum process is in effect at the EU hotspots

in Greece. At the core of this process is an eligibility check that is intended to determine in advance whether an asylum application will even be accepted – or whether the asylum seekers were already granted (or could have been eligible for) asylum in Turkey, the country from which they arrived in the EU. The researchers are critical of the fact that, for this to happen, the conditions applied in Turkey must match the requirements of European guidelines – something neither the EU nor the Greek authorities can control.

European law scholars regard the fact that the accelerated procedure currently lacks any legal basis as a serious flaw. After the EU-Turkey deal was signed, a corresponding law entered into force following a considerable delay. The term of this legislation expired

in early 2017 – yet the procedure continues to be used. As a result, the period in which an asylum seeker can appeal against rejection of their application is reduced from 30 days to five. Given the fact that asylum seekers in the hotspots have hardly any access to legal information or advice, many lawyers consider this to be highly problematic.

Ziebritzki and Nestler also see the role of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) as questionable. The agency is simply supposed to support the Greek administration; in practice, it exercises significant influence over asylum decisions. According to the re-

searchers’ work, in most cases it is exclusively EASO employees who are responsible for conducting eligibility checks. They hear an asylum seeker’s case, produce a protocol and issue a “recommendation” that, as a rule, the Greek asylum authorities follow.

The two researchers are also critical of the fact that the EASO occupies an influential position in other areas of the asylum procedure – without any judicial recourse against its decisions. This is because there is no court that ensures effective legal protection against the EASO’s activities – a shortcoming that, incidentally, also applies to Frontex, the

European border control agency, and Europol, the EU’s police authority. At present, the only method by which rights can be asserted against these institutions is submission of a complaint to the European ombudsperson.

This brings up a series of further research issues: The hypothesis is that the EU is increasingly impinging on asylum decisions – not only legally, but also administratively. The researchers therefore aim to investigate the function and methods of the EASO, as well as the responsibility of the EU for the violations against the law committed in Greek hotspots. ◀



Freezing cold in the hotspot: Even several years after refugee camps were established on the Greek islands, some of the accommodations are still not winter-proof.



A new home in Manhattan: More than one-third of New Yorkers were born outside the US. These migrants are generally healthier than the native residents.

## Does Exclusion Make Migrants Ill?

From US studies we know that migrants are usually healthier than average citizens of the same age. However, this effect lessens with time. Scientists from the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock are looking into whether this phenomenon also applies to Europe, as well as the possible causes that might help explain it.

A person who sets out to start a new life in a foreign country usually meets one main precondition: he or she is generally healthy. People with chronic illnesses or other physical ailments rarely emigrate. In science, this phenomenon is known as the healthy migrant effect. As a range of international studies have shown, migrants are thus, on average, healthier than their new fellow citizens. And they also differ in one further respect: there is usually a clear connection between an individual's socioeconomic status – education, profession and income – and the state of their health. Poor and socially disadvantaged persons tend to suffer from heart disease, diabetes and asthma much more often than the rest of the population. Yet this connection is far less evident among migrants.

However, any health advantages apply first and foremost to recent migrants. The longer migrants spend in their new home country, the smaller the differences compared with the rest

of the population become. Such insights are particularly well founded for classic immigration countries such as the US and Canada. However, research in Europe has so far produced contradictory results.

A team headed by Mikko Myrskylä of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research is now using large data sets from Italy, Finland and Sweden to systematically examine the healthy migrant effect in the European context. The researchers suspect that the effect will also be evident here and will ebb away in the same manner over time. The issue of what causes this phenomenon is at the very heart of the investigation: why does the state of migrants' health worsen with time?

The researchers have proposed the theory that exclusion could be the primary factor, as migrants suffer from disadvantages in various areas: it's harder for them to make social contacts, as they often have a poor grasp of the language. Many of them find themselves in poorly paid jobs that are looked

down upon – partly due to linguistic barriers, and partly because their qualifications aren't recognized. In terms of the healthcare system, the language barrier also poses a hurdle. Furthermore, migrants are less likely to lead healthy lifestyles; one reason may be that campaigns promoting healthy living are less likely to reach them.

If the researchers can prove that socioeconomic disadvantages damage the health of migrants, it would be an important insight for society as a whole. Until now, it has been hard to identify the causal relationship that exists between social exclusion of migrant populations and health. Are immigrants ill because they are excluded? Or are they excluded because good academic qualifications and a well-paid job can only be attained with a robust constitution? Both connections certainly exist. As the migrants enjoyed better-than-average health when they first arrived, their example may serve to demonstrate the impact of social exclusion on health. ◀