

Fenna tom Dieck & Lisa Rosen

Introduction: Volunteering in the context of flight and asylum – A growing area of research in Germany

Events in Germany's recent history of forced migration have led to an increase in civil society engagement. The first event of this kind was referred to in 2015 as the "long summer of migration" (Römhild et al., 2018) or the "short summer of mercy" (Mecheril, 2020). Increased civic engagement quickly became a mass phenomenon, only to decline soon after (Kopahnke, 2017). The number of students, who were initially overrepresented in the group of volunteers helping refugees, decreased within a year (Kleist & Karakayali, 2015). The Russian war against Ukraine and the resulting refugee movements were the next event leading to a significant increase in active civil engagement in Germany (Götz et al., 2022). From spring 2022, civil society again played a crucial role in assisting refugees. Welcome committees were set up at train stations, along with welcome cafés, German language courses, and play groups for children. It was referred to as the new 'welcome culture', reminiscent of 2015/2016. However, it remains to be seen whether this welcome culture will be a short-lived trend (Dinkelaker et al., 2021).

This special issue examines the phenomenon of volunteering in the context of forced migration and asylum in Germany from different perspectives and presents current qualitative research projects on the topic. The field of research is outlined below and the articles in this special issue are situated within it.

Migration researchers criticise several aspects of volunteering. Firstly, they point to its potentially unsustainable nature and, secondly that it may contribute to the failure of states to take responsibility and provide (financial) support to refugees (Bygballe Jensen & Kirchner, 2020; Maestri & Monforte, 2020). This tension is fundamental to volunteering and is increasingly evident in different fields (Hilse-Carstensen et al., 2019). Volunteers who take on tasks that are the responsibility of the welfare state, mostly unpaid, may contribute to the destabilisation and deprofessionalisation of social work (Sprung & Kukovetz, 2017; Daphi & Stern, 2019). Furthermore, the motives for volunteering have long been problematised. They often move between the poles of charity and political transformation, and thus always in a field of tension between compassion, paternalism and solidarity (Castro-Varela & Heinemann, 2016).

These fundamental areas of tension in volunteering in the context of flight and asylum, as well as the multiple short-term increases in civil society engagement in this area, have attracted the interest of migration researchers. Research on volunteering for refugees in Germany often focuses on socio-demographic variables and motives of those involved, as well as on the cooperation between volunteer initiatives and administrations. For example, Simonson et al. (2021) provide a descriptive overview of volunteering and Karakayali (2018) offers a critical mapping of the field. According to Karakayali and Kleist (2016, p. 4), volunteers are predominantly female, well-educated and economically stable. In contrast, third-country nationals are strongly underrepresented among volunteers, as noted by *Johannes Eick* and *Markus Ottersbach* in their contribution “Promoting the social engagement of

third-country nationals in associations as a task of social work. Findings and recommendations from an evaluation study in North Rhine-Westphalia” in this issue. The authors identify the continued presence of local associations, the development of sustainable relationships and the long-term support of new volunteers as key factors for success.

There are a number of studies, often in the context of commissioned research, that focus on opportunities and barriers to the implementation of volunteering and the recruitment of participants. However, studies exploring the patterns of meaning-making and practice within volunteering with refugees by different actors are just recently becoming a growing area of research in Germany. So far, these studies have mainly focused on the perspectives of volunteers and professionals who support volunteering. They often uncover latent meanings and thus potentially uncomfortable patterns of meaning and practice for the actors involved – for example, because they contradict their self-image as anti-racist supporters (see Friedrich & Rosen, 2024). Sabine Hoffmann, for example, analyses interviews with people involved in activist groups that have emerged since 2015 to examine how sameness and otherness (*sensu* Said) are reproduced when talking about the popular slogan “refugees welcome” (Hoffmann, 2018). Similarly, Elias Steinhilper and Larissa Fleischmann reconstruct a new “dispositif of helping” that has developed in recent years (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017, p. 20). It focuses on often depoliticised charitable engagement aimed at supporting those ‘in need’ and stands apart from the previously dominant embedding of civil society engagement in political contexts critical of racism and capitalism. In this respect, as Anke Freuwört points out, purely charitable motives can reinforce paternalistic attitudes and practi-

ces towards refugees, reducing them to a (supposed) need for help (Freuwört, 2022, p. 271). Another focus of this research area is the relationship between volunteers and refugees. For her master's thesis, *Verena Bauer* conducted problem-centred interviews with refugee and non-refugee participants in social mentoring projects and elaborated on the often asymmetrical relationships. In her article for this special issue, she summarises her analysis and points to the discomfort of both refugee and non-refugee participants with persistent power asymmetries, particularly in decision-making processes. She identifies different strategies used by participants to navigate and secure agency within mentoring relationships. Hannah Schott-Leser's dissertation also focused on relationships between volunteers and young refugees in a project for the prevention of drug abuse. She analysed guided interviews, diary entries and group discussions conducted with both mentors and mentees. A key finding which she addresses to practitioners is the need for professional support in mentoring relationships (Schott-Leser, 2018, p. 289). Jens Vogler, Monika Alisch, Manuela Westphal and Anke Freuwört came to a similar conclusion when they analysed couple interviews with refugees and non-refugees who had met through volunteering. They found that even in relationships that participants described as friendships, asymmetrical communication and interaction emerged in the interviews, especially when the origin of the relationship lay in charitable initiatives (Vogler et al., 2021, p. 226). Here, Jens Vogler's dissertation (2022) adds another perspective by analysing the relationship between volunteers and social workers through problem-centred interviews. In addition, the following ethnographic research projects reconstruct, among other things, the ways in which relationships are shaped against the backdrop of the underlying tensions mentioned above. Larissa Fleischmann, for example, critically examines the means by which

volunteers are instrumentalised to ensure the governability of refugees (Fleischmann, 2019). Annika Hoppe-Seyler reconstructs a critical awareness of this instrumentalisation among those involved (Hoppe-Seyler, 2020, p. 240). Niklas-Max Thönneßen explores how voluntary engagement is realised in the simultaneity of governmental integration demands and exclusion mechanisms (2019a, p. 288). He concludes that this simultaneity leads to a categorisation of refugees with regard to an imagined ‘integrability’, combined with the adoption of corresponding demands on refugees in the context of volunteering (Thönneßen, 2019b, p. 58). Geesche Decker has found that refugee participants appreciate the open and comparatively low-threshold framework of language cafés and experience themselves as self-effective. At the same time the state restrictions of the asylum regime repeatedly position them as aid recipients (Decker, 2019, p. 161). Our project “Social Mentoring in the Context of Flight and Asylum” also reconstructs relationships that are realised within the various tensions of volunteering mentioned above. In the article “On common ground, half full glasses and boundaries – Developing multi-perspectivity in research on social mentoring with refugees” in this special issue, *Verena Bauer, Fenna tom Dieck, Sara Ismailaj and Lisa Rosen* trace how the perspectives of different actors were brought into focus and illuminated in the course of the research project using different qualitative research methods. They argue for a multi-perspective research approach to capture the complexity of social mentoring.

In general, multi-perspectivity can be achieved not only by including the perspectives of different actors, but also through different research contexts. Three of them are represented in this special issue: Firstly, transfer or commissioned research (contribution by Johannes Eick and Markus Ottersbach); secondly, research in

the context of a student thesis (see the work of Verena Bauer); and finally, the development of a research project that initially started as a critical service-learning project in university teaching (contribution by Verena Bauer, Sara Ismailaj, Lisa Rosen and Fenna tom Dieck). Another key feature of multi-perspectivity is the diversity of research approaches and data types: The three projects presented in this special issue rely mainly on qualitative interviews. In addition, Johannes Eick and Markus Ottersbach conducted ethnographic observations in training courses for volunteers and were thus able to gain insights into situational practices. In the project “Social Mentoring in the Context of Flight and Asylum”, written student portfolios were included in the analyses, thus providing a special form of self-description and self-representation by the volunteers.

Future research on volunteering in the context of flight and asylum can benefit from the further development of multi-perspective approaches with the aim of systematically broadening the research focus in different aspects. The inclusion of different stakeholder perspectives can facilitate the de-centering of researchers’ perspectives, which are often shaped by their dominant status as members of the majority with specific interests and values (Hoffmann, 2018, p. 223). Furthermore, they may sometimes benefit from the power relations created by the asylum regime (Christ, 2019, p. 382). Consistently incorporating the relevance of pedagogical practice, as well as the views of majoritarian and marginalised activists, can help to challenge dominant interpretations and readings. A deeper consideration of the interweaving of perspectives and motives of different actors offers the potential to generate practice-relevant knowledge that enables conceptual development of volunteering and social mentoring. In addition, multi-perspecti-

vity should be sought by conducting research not only on charitable initiatives linked to mainstream society but also on grassroots movements, migrant self-organisations and politically and trade union-organised projects.

We would like to conclude our plea for multi-perspectivity by thanking the editors of the journal “Perspektiven” for giving us the opportunity to publish this special issue on volunteering in the context of flight and asylum in Germany!

*Düsseldorf, Cologne and Landau in April 2024,
Fenna tom Dieck & Lisa Rosen*

References

- Bygballe Jensen, L.S., & Kirchner, L.M. (2020).** Acts of Volunteering for Refugees: Local Responses to Global Challenges. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(4), 26–40.
- Castro Varela, M., & Heinemann, A. (2016).** Mitleid, Paternalismus, Solidarität. Zur Rolle von Affekten in der politisch-kulturellen Arbeit. In M. Ziese & C. Gritschke (Eds.), *Geflüchtete und Kulturelle Bildung. Formate und Konzepte für ein neues Praxisfeld* (pp. 51–66). transcript.
- Christ, S. (2019).** Relevante Ethnologie im institutionell gerahmten Interaktionsfeld Geflüchteter. In S. Klocke-Daffa (Eds.), *Angewandte Ethnologie* (pp. 379–390). Springer VS.
- Daphi, P., & Stern, V. (2019).** Engagement für und mit Geflüchteten. Reflexionen zur Zivilgesellschaft. In R. Johler & J. Lange (Eds.), *Konfliktfeld Fluchtmigration: Historische und ethnographische Perspektiven* (pp. 265–280). transcript.
- Decker, G. (2019).** Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Teilhabe zugewanderter und geflüchteter Menschen am Beispiel einer ethnographischen Forschung zu Sprachcafés. In M. E. Kaufmann, L. Otto, S. Nimführ, & D. Schütte (Eds.), *Forschen und Arbeiten im Kontext von Flucht* (pp. 143–168). Springer VS.
- Dinkelaker, S., Huke, N., & Tietje, O. (2021).** Nach der „Willkommenskultur“. Geflüchtete zwischen umkämpfter Teilhabe und zivilgesellschaftlicher Solidarität. transcript.
- Fleischmann, L., & Steinhilper, E. (2017).** The Myth of Apolitical Volunteering for Refugees: German Welcome Culture and a New Dispositif of Helping. *Social Inclusion*, 5(3), 17–27.
- Fleischmann, L. (2019).** Making Volunteering with Refugees Governable: The Contested Role of ‘Civil Society’ in the German Welcome Culture. *Social Inclusion*, 7(2), 64–73.
- Fleischmann, L. (2020).** Contested Solidarity. Practices of Refugee Support between Humanitarian Help and Political Activism. transcript.
- Freuwört, A. (2022).** Ehrenamtliche Arbeit mit Geflüchteten – Ein Spannungs- und Abhängigkeitsverhältnis zwischen Paternalismus und Empowerment. In M. Stock, N. Hodaie, S. Immerfall und M. Menz (Eds.), *Arbeitstitel: Migrationsgesellschaft* (pp. 265–281). Springer VS.
- Friedrich, J., & Rosen, L. (2024).** Freiwilliges Engagement in der Flucht*Migrationsgesellschaft – Zur Rekonstruktion von Privilegien und Unterwerfung in der lebensgeschichtlichen Erzählung einer ehrenamtlich tätigen Seniorin. In P. Baquero de Torres, M.-A. Boger, C. Chadderton, L. Chamakalayil, S. Spieker, & A. Wischmann (Eds.), *Jahrbuch für Pädagogik 2023 – Rassismuskritik und (Post)Kolonialismus* (pp. 215–227). Beltz Juventa.

- Götz, L., Kemnitzer, T., Ratajszczak, T., Seddig, M., & Steinhilper, E. (2022).** Engagement für Geflüchtete im Wandel: Ergebnisse einer Befragung zur Tätigkeit der Freiwilligenagenturen im Bereich Flucht und Asyl. Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freiwilligenagenturen.
- Hilse-Carstensen, T., Meusel, S., & Zimmermann, G. (2019).** Freiwilliges Engagement und soziale Inklusion: Perspektiven zweier gesellschaftlicher Phänomene in Wissenschaft und Praxis. In T. Hilse-Carstensen, S. Meusel, & G. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Freiwilliges Engagement und soziale Inklusion. Perspektiven zweier gesellschaftlicher Phänomene in Wissenschaft und Praxis* (pp. 11–23). Springer VS.
- Hoffmann, S. (2018).** Refugees Welcome? Eine rassismuskritische Perspektive auf Forschungsprozesse im Zuge von FluchtMigration. In S. Goebel, T. Fischer, F. Kießling, & A. Treiber (Eds.), *FluchtMigration und gesellschaftliche Transformationsprozesse* (pp. 217–237). Springer VS.
- Hoppe-Seyler, A. (2020).** Arenas of Volunteering: Experiences, Practices and Conflicts of Voluntary Refugee Relief. In B. Glorius & J. Doomernik (Eds.), *Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities* (pp. 225–243). Springer.
- Karakayali, S., & Kleist, J.O. (2015).** EFA-Studie. Strukturen und Motive der ehrenamtlichen Flüchtlingsarbeit (EFA) in Deutschland. 1. Forschungsbericht. Berliner Institut für Empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (BIM).
- Karakayali, S., & Kleist, J.O. (2016).** EFA-Studie 2. Strukturen und Motive der ehrenamtlichen Flüchtlingsarbeit (EFA) in Deutschland. 2. Forschungsbericht. Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (BIM).
- Karakayali, S. (2018).** Ehrenamtliches Engagement für Geflüchtete in Deutschland. State-of-Research Papier 09, Verbundprojekt ‚Flucht: Forschung und Transfer‘. <https://flucht-forschung-transfer.de/wpcontent/uploads/2017/05/SoR-09-Karakayali.pdf>
- Kopahnke, H. (2017).** Ehrenamtliches Engagement für Geflüchtete. Postkoloniale Perspektiven und die Rolle der Affekte am Beispiel der ehrenamtlichen Vormundschaft. *Neue Praxis: Zeitschrift für Sozialarbeit, Sozialpädagogik und Sozialpolitik*, 2017(6), 561–568.
- Maestri, G., & Monforte, P. (2020).** Who deserves compassion? The moral and emotional dilemmas of volunteering in the ‘refugee crisis’. *Sociology*, 54(5), 920-935.
- Mecheril, P. (2020).** Gibt es ein transnationales Selbstbestimmungsrecht? Bewegungs-ethische Erkundungen. In I. van Ackeren, H. Bremer, F. Kessl, H.C. Koller, N. Pfaff, C. Rotter, D. Klein, U. Salaschek (Eds.), *Bewegungen: Beiträge zum 26. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft*, (pp. 101-117). Barbara Budrich.
- Römhild, R., Schwanhäuser, A., zur Nieden, B., & Yurdakul, G. (2018).** Witnessing the transition: Moments in the long summer of migration. Berliner Institut für Empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (BIM).
- Schott-Leser, H. (2018).** Ehrenamt im Kontext von Flucht und Marginalisierung. Eine rekonstruktive Untersuchung pädagogischer Laientätigkeit auf Basis von Patenschaftsbeziehungen mit jungen Menschen in prekären Lebenslagen. Barbara Budrich.

Simonson, J., Kelle, N., Kausmann, C., Karnick, N., Arriagada, C., Hagen, C., Hameister, N., Hushold, O., & Tesch-Römer, C. (2021). Freiwilliges Engagement in Deutschland: Zentrale Ergebnisse des Fünften Deutschen Freiwilligensurveys (FWS 2019). Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.

Sprung, A., & Kukovetz, B. (2017). Politische Bildungsprozesse in der Unterstützung Geflüchteter: Lernort „Freiwilliges Engagement“. *Magazin Erwachsenenbildung.at*, 2017(31).

Thönneßen, N.-M. (2019a). Ehrenamtliche als Integrationslotsen im totalen Flüchtlingsraum? Risiken und Chancen der Orientierung am Integrationsbegriff im Feld ehrenamtlicher Unterstützung für Geflüchtete. In M. Kaufmann, L. Otto, S. Nimführ, & D. Schütte (Eds.), *Forschen und Arbeiten im Kontext von Flucht* (pp. 285–310). Springer VS.

Thönneßen, N.-M. (2019b). Erfolgsgeschichten und Sorgenkinder. Zur Konstruktion von Integrationsfähigkeit in und durch ‚Willkommensinitiativen‘. In M. Bach, L. Narawitz, J. Schroeder, M. Thielen, & N.-M. Thönneßen (Eds.), *Fluchtmigrationsforschung im Widerstreit. Über Ausschlüsse durch Integration* (pp. 51–65). Waxmann.

Vogler, J., Alisch, M., Westphal, M. & Freuwört, A. (2021). Das Versprechen, dass aus Fremden Freund*innen werden. Analyse von Tandeminterviews zwischen Zugewanderten und Nicht-Zugewanderten. *Theorie und Praxis der Sozialen Arbeit*, 72(3), 220-227.

Vogler, J. (2022). Arbeitsbeziehungen im Handlungsfeld Migration. Eine empirische Untersuchung zum vielschichtigen Handeln von Sozialarbeiter*innen und freiwillig Engagierten. Springer VS.