

# The case of German labor market integration projects targeting refugee women: Activating the 'other' or supporting equal participation (Working title)

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## Background

- High investment in integration policies in post-2015 Germany, mainly labor market integration projects
- Multitude of actors involved with diverse background and experiences
- More attention towards refugee women
- Increased policy development towards gender-specific labor market integration projects targeting refugee women

## Research questions

- How are these projects implemented? How do the projects imagine support and address refugee women?

## Research design

- Theoretical approach
  - Problematizations and subject positions: Social constructivism, sociology of knowledge, implicit and explicit normative foundations of policy goals, representations
  - Postcolonial feminist theory: Binary constructions of modern selves/underdeveloped others, ethnosexism
- Methodological approach
  - Policy practice: Comparative analysis of 6 project cases (theoretical sampling to cover the spectrum of projects in the field)
  - Interviews with practitioners + participants, observations, document analysis

## Literature review

- Three strands of literature
  - Feminist refugee studies and critical humanitarian studies (Hyndman 1998; Szczepanikova 2005; Grabska 2011; Freedman 2011; Olivius 2014)
  - Studies on reception and integration policies (Kurki, et al. 2018; Breidahl 2017; Hagelund & Kavil 2009)
  - Feminist welfare studies (Lewis & Giullari 2005; Betzel & Bothfeld 2011; Jaehrling & Knuth 2010, Jaehrling 2015)
- Previous studies on gender equality policies in refugee and humanitarian aid have often been **very broad and undifferentiated**, including a variety of policies such as health, work and housing or explored gender relations of refugees in camps more generally; Also in research economic participation of refugee women was for a long time a rather neglected issue, only since recently more published => This study focus on employment-related policies
- Agency + vulnerability: Recent studies on refugees put increased attention towards **refugees agency, activeness + resources**, instead of their vulnerability and deficiency. => Adding to this debate with focus on employment-related empowerment

- Empowerment: Several studies on refugee **empowerment** have shown how complicated the implementation of empowerment projects, also in the field of employment
- Governance: Studies with focus on discourse and governance warn against the instrumentalization of feminist rhetoric and gender equality ideas as **governing tool to control** refugees; role of victimisation, racial/ethnized othering => This study focus on the variety of policy practice and policy implementation by different actors
- The extension and diversification of the field of gender-specific employment-related support for refugees led to the **involvement of new actors**, including for-profit and private organizations and third sector organizations without experience in the field. => This study recognise the multitude of actors in the field
- The post-2015 reception policy reforms have led to increased **overlap of labor market and asylum policies**: Instead of long waiting periods and exclusion the state nowadays supports fast economic integration and **activation** of refugees => What does this mean for gender-specific projects?
- Debates on women’s empowerment and gender equality programs in the (German) welfare state: The German welfare state is characterised by a **conservative gender regime**. Welfare, family, and social policies, particularly the concepts of “means testing” of individual neediness and the family as “community in need” increase the dependence of women on husbands and families to make welfare claims. The neoliberal transformation of the welfare state marked a partial shift from the (gender typical) **male breadwinner model** to the (gender neutral) **universal adult worker model** and follows the logic of sanction and support => Effect: increased women’s economic participation, cut of social benefits, emergence of low-skilled care sector
- Many feminist welfare studies focused on **public employment agencies**; discussions about **deskilling and degrading, role of stereotypes** => neglected the role of the diverse organizations implementing the projects

## Structure of the article

### Version 1: Based on the analytical approach: activities, problematizations and effects

1. Introduction
2. The German context
3. Literature review
4. Research design
5. The projects
6. Findings
  - a. **Saving refugee women from patriarchy through work**
    - i. *Activities*
    - ii. *Problem constructions*
    - iii. *Reactions by participants*
  - b. **Empowering refugee women through (work) recognition and rights**
    - i. *Activities*
    - ii. *Problem constructions*
    - iii. *Reactions by participants*
  - c. Discussion
  - d. Conclusion

	<b>Saving refugee women from patriarchy through work</b>		<b>Empowering refugee women through (work) recognition and rights</b>	
	Activities + solutions	Problematizations + representations	Activities + solutions	Problematizations + representations
Family				
State provision				
Labor market				

=> Representation of refugee women, their agency and understanding of empowerment

**Version 2: Based on the comparative case analysis: Giving familial care, receiving state provision and preparing for professional (care) work and effects**

1. Introduction
2. The German context
3. Literature review
4. Research design
5. The projects
6. Findings
  - a. **Saving refugee women from patriarchy through work**
    - i. *Family: Refugee women as victims of conservative families*
    - ii. *State provision: Refugee women in need of productivity and self-sufficiency*
    - iii. *Labor market: Meritocracy and refugee women as underdeveloped economic actors*
    - iv. *Reactions by participants*
  - b. **Empowering refugee women through (work) recognition and rights**
    - i. *Family: Refugee women as clients of a conservative welfare regime*
    - ii. *State provision: Refugee women in need of support and recognition*
    - iii. *Labor market: Marginal positioning and refugee women as economically vulnerable actors*
    - iv. *Reactions by participants*
7. Discussion & Conclusion

**(Version 3: I don't want to follow this argumentation, but this would be another option)**

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1. Findings
  - a. **Family**
    - i. *Refugee women as victims of conservative families*
    - ii. *Refugee women as clients of a conservative welfare regime*
  - b. **State provision**
    - i. *Refugee women in need of productivity and self-sufficiency*
    - ii. *Refugee women in need of support and recognition*
  - c. **Labor market**
    - i. *Meritocracy and refugee women as underdeveloped economic actors*

ii. *Marginal positioning and refugee women as economically vulnerable actors*

**d. Reactions by participants**

- i. *Resistance, anger and frustration*  
ii. *Community belonging and identity*

## Main contribution

**Result:** two conflicting and competing tendencies of implementation co-existed => dealing with conflicting and overlapping economising, humanitarian and empowering discourses and logics

- Depoliticised, individualised and economised perspective, differentiation between economically active and not yet active women; => meritocratic and earned citizenship approach, typical for neoliberal welfare states
- Politicised, broader social perspective on agency and structural limits => typical for civil-rights, feminist, anti-racist movements

1. Contribution to the debate on **agency + vulnerability** of refugee women

- Refugee women are increasingly addressed as (potential) economic actors (and less as passive, family-oriented victim)
- In parts reproduction of vulnerability discourse, although in parts more nuanced
- Adoption of activeness discourse, yet, with different nuances and perspectives

2. Contribution to the debate on **economic empowerment projects** for refugees

- Two tendencies co-existed => relevance of the implementing organizations
- The need for empowerment and the causes of oppression are explained differently
  - The problematic family and culture
  - The problematic state and labor market (structures, regulations, politics)

3. Contribution to the debate on **governing practices** of gender equality projects for refugees

- Neoliberal and governing (activation + integration) discourses were only partially manifested in the projects

**Possible explanations:** Role of organizational experience in the field, relation/proximity to the state and dominant discourses and professional standards with regard to gendered/racialized stereotyping => organizations in the field adopted different gendered discourses and knowledge due to positioning

## Questions for Discussion

- What version of the empirical analysis would you prefer?
- Should I label the categories with “refugee women as ...”?
- What do you need to know about the German welfare state and feminist welfare studies in the literature review to understand my paper?
- Are my contributions in the discussion section clear? What do you regard as minor or major points?