

Prof. Dr. Anja Weiß, University of Duisburg-Essen

Position: Professor for Sociology with a Focus on Macrosociology and Transnational Processes at the Institute for Sociology at the University of Duisburg-Essen



Research interests: global and transnational inequalities, highly skilled migrants, glocalization of professional knowledge, (institutional) racism and legal exclusion, ethnic conflict and anti-racism, qualitative research designs

(Re-)Entering vocational labor markets – the challenge of recognizing migrants' skills

The paper starts with a review of representative findings on the labor market integration of refugees in Canada and Germany as well as a summary of a country-comparative study on high skilled migrants' trajectories into the labor markets of Germany, Canada, and Turkey. Considering that refugees who actually reach Germany and Canada are a highly select group, it is notable that their labor market outcomes are worse than those of other immigrants. This is not only due to continued traumatization of refugees, lack of human capital among some refugees and the need to learn new languages. Relative disadvantage in the labor market also results from the ways in which forced migration is managed internationally and from institutional contexts in receiving countries.

With the help of a country-comparative approach the impact of institutional contexts on the process of labor market integration can be highlighted. The paper will identify and discuss four main obstacles to the labor market integration of refugees:

a) The channeling of skilled migrants into non-labor related visa categories

The refugee status differs from other migration channels in that states are bound by international law to respond to a claim for asylum. In contrast, labor or qualification migration can be governed by interest driven immigration policies. Yet, in extended conflict situations the same person may be able to either seek refuge or look for educational or labor opportunities abroad. At the moment, the incompatibility of migration regimes results in a channeling of forced migrants into migration regimes detrimental to labor market inclusion.

b) Legal exclusion

While Canada gives full labor market access to refugees on arrival, Germany and Turkey enforce highly differentiated regimes of (semi-)exclusion. In Germany, not only the legal regulations as such but also the complexity of visa categories and the collective experience of legal complications result in exclusionary practices even for migrants who – in the eyes of policy makers and the general population – could and should have full access to the labor market.

c) Long cooling out periods

The need to apply for resettlement and/or the difficulty to overcome borders combined with lengthy administrative procedures after arrival result in very long cooling out periods. Long-

term enforced inactivity has a significantly negative impact on labor market outcome irrespective of migration status.

d) Inadequate recognition of institutionalized and incorporated cultural capital

Both in Germany and Canada recognition of foreign educational certificates is institutionalized in federal law. The practice of credential recognition is however complicated by the complexity of professional knowledge, the federal organization of education, and the assumption that local certificates are the measure against foreign education can only fail.

Actors on the communal level can address all of these concerns, but they are in a particularly good position to expedite administrative processes and to ensure that cultural capital is recognized and improved. The paper will conclude with some practical suggestions that address the latter two concerns.