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# Refugees and rural development: Chances from migration and challenges of integration

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## Abstract:

The current immigration of refugees leads to a discussion about links between rural development and migration. Some rural regions in Germany formulate the hope that they can benefit from refugee immigration. In these areas, the impacts of aging and population decline with labour and skills shortages are often more relevant than in larger cities.

So the questions are: What are the chances from refugee immigration? For which kind of rural areas are these opportunities realistic? And which framework conditions and governance arrangements for integration are conducive to using these opportunities?

With regard to the attractiveness of various rural areas in Germany for immigration and their integration abilities, the conditions are quite different while in Eastern Germany the possibilities are lower. Multi-level-integration governance is required to make the best use of the chances. To shape suitable framework conditions for integration there is a need of a region specific, integrated view on the different factors of integration.

## Keywords:

Rural development, Germany, Integration, Refugees, Migration

## Zusammenfassung:

Einige ländliche Regionen formulieren Hoffnungen, dass diese von der Immigration von Geflüchteten profitieren können. In diesen Regionen sind die Wirkungen der Alterung und des Rückgangs der Bevölkerung (einhergehend mit dem Mangel insbesondere von Fachkräften) oft bedeutsamer als in größeren Städten.

Somit stellen sich die Fragen: Was sind Chancen der Immigration? Für welche der ländlichen Räume sind solche Optionen realistisch? Und welche Rahmenbedingungen und Governance Arrangements zur Integration unterstützen die Nutzung dieser Optionen?

## Keywords (deutsch):

Ländliche Entwicklung, Deutschland, Integration, Flüchtlinge, Migration

## 1. Background and research questions

The current immigration of refugees is a major topic in political debates in Germany. For rural areas, such immigration is usually much less compared to larger cities but could have an impact as well, as local populations are smaller. Moreover, the impact of aging and fertility decline is more serious in those non-metropolitan areas (especially in Eastern-Germany) because of the labour and skills shortage caused by the out-migration of youth to larger cities (Tomoko 2013).

The initial refugee distribution after arrival in Germany also brings refugees into such rural areas, which are not at all typical places for immigration. Typical drivers in migration theories (Brettell & Hollifield 2015; Castles 2007) are for example labour market conditions (Rodríguez-Pose et al. 2016) or existing networks (Bertoli & Ruysen 2016).

Thus there is little knowledge about how many of these refugees will stay in such rural areas.

These are starting points for discussions in the public and the scientific community about links between rural development and migration as well as of challenges of integration (Brettell & Hollifield 2015). Besides costs for integration and direct economic impacts (De Haas 2007) there is a discussion on how (and whether at all) the immigration of refugees could support adaptations to demographic changes, especially in shortages of skilled employees and sustainable maintenance of basic services as a major aspect of quality of life, which is also crucial to becoming/staying attractive for skilled employees (Pollermann et al. 2014, Moren-Alegret 2008). So some rural regions are actively searching for benefits from immigration and support integration through own concepts and public funding (Pollermann 2016).

The integration process involves two different perspectives: the receiving society as well as the refugees (Strang & Ager 2010, Tomoko 2013, Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014). The reception in the host country is a vital part of the post-migration experience. Therefore, the asylum procedure and the asylum accommodation as well as the eventually granted residence status are considered key issues in refugee integration (Bakker et al. 2013).

A certain degree of integration is a pre-condition for most of the economic benefits and an important factor for the quality of life for the refugees themselves (which is a major point for the decision for a settlement in a rural area instead of moving to larger cities). Challenges of integration include different dimensions like language, labour market and housing. With regard to housing, in many German rural areas the possibilities for a speedy provision of own living spaces are much better than in urban areas, but there are also shortages in infrastructures which would be important for successful integration. Altogether there is a dynamic interrelationship of factors shaping the integration processes (Strang & Ager 2010; Ager & Strang 2008).

So the questions for this contribution are:

What are the specific chances from refugee immigration for rural development and for which kind of rural areas these opportunities are realistic?

What are suitable framework conditions and governance arrangements to support integration?

## 2. Data and methods

To identify chances from migration for rural development, literature about economic impacts as well as about basic services under conditions of demographic change is taken into account.

To elaborate a framework to analyse migration processes, there is a literature review about existing migration theories (Brettell & Hollifield 2015, Rodríguez-Pose et al. 2016, Bertoli & Ruysen 2016). On this basis there is an adaption to the special conditions of “forced migration” of refugees and the specific situations in peripheral rural areas, which are typical for a lot of rural areas especially in transition countries, but have up to now rarely been a subject of (im)migration research.<sup>1</sup>

Official statistical data is used to elaborate estimations about refugee immigration and integration in various types of rural areas in Germany (i.e., about (un)employment, development of working population). In the lecture maps comprising these data are used to illustrate spatial dimensions (Plankl et al. 2016).

Literature on experiences in rural areas in different European countries is used to discuss challenges of integration (Netherlands: Bakker et al. (2013); Sweden: Joonas et al. (2015), Tomoko (2013); Scotland: Kirkwood et al. (2015); Spain: Moren-Alegret (2008)).

For estimations about support measures and suitable governance arrangements, own experiences from the evaluation of Rural Development Programs (especially LEADER as a participatory approach for rural development) is used (Pollermann et al. 2014a).

## 3. Main results

To elaborate the **chances for rural development** it is useful to view both sides: on the one hand, a high quality of life is a favouring condition to attract immigration, and on the other hand, immigration can contribute to the quality of life in rural areas. A promising option is to create economic activities in the field of local supply and provision of convenience goods (Pollermann et al. 2016). Also the specific conditions of labour market developments in rural areas show chances. A lot of problems are common to both refugees and at least parts of the local population (like public transportation, which is also a problem for young/old people without a driver's licence/car). Thus chances are more to create linkages to such issues of rural development (Pollermann et al. 2016), but less in increasing the population to overcome losses through outmigration and general demographic developments.

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<sup>1</sup> Talking about migration literature has to take into account, that there is an “almost complete separation between those who examined why and how migration took place, and those who studied the place of migrants in receiving societies and processes of incorporation into societies. The former area was closely linked to development studies, and mainly involved economists, political economists and geographers. The latter involved sociologists, anthropologists, cultural studies, political scientists, educationalists and legal scholars” (Castles 2015).

With regard to the attractiveness for immigration and integration ability of different types of rural areas, the data analysis shows that the **conditions are quite different in varying regions** in Germany. So it is important not to overestimate the chances for rural areas, because a lot of immigration will ultimately go to urban areas. This is supported by implications from migration theories as well as experiences from different countries.

There is a study from Forssell (2009) about how the locality size affects the **integration of quota refugees** in Sweden. Results of the qualitative interviews in two different Swedish regions (Ljusdal and Gävle) are, that more social and cultural contacts in the smaller locality compared to the larger one have been found. He argues that the tolerant and inclusive structure in the smaller town with some daily meeting places, especially the church, contributes to develop networks for refugees (Forssell 2009, Ishii 2013).

For Germany altogether data show that some rural areas can be attractive for skilled employees and families, whereas in Eastern Germany the possibilities are lower. The job opportunities in Eastern Germany are still fewer but there is no general split between urban-rural areas. Also, there are fewer migrant communities which would make the orientation for refugees much easier and more attractive. Detailed **maps with different indicators for integration conditions** are provided by Plankl et al. (2016). Thereby there is a need to look carefully at the single aspects of integration, it does not make sense to create one map and stamp the regions “suitable for integration” or “not suitable for integration”. The infrastructure for integration is in many fields often not optimal in rural areas (especially regarding public transport, communities, basic services), but some “soft” conditions are even better, whereby this differs very much at the local level, also depending on key personalities.

To shape **suitable framework conditions** it is important to put more emphasis on the needs of refugees, because like in the German population there are different mental preferences for rural or urban areas (Moren-Alegret 2008). Such preferences could be, besides classical factors like job opportunities, a key for sustainable integration. In Germany life satisfaction in general is not lower in rural areas, but life is different (and the conflicts of immigration are different – it is often easier to build a mosque in an urban neighbourhood than in a rural area). Also gender aspects of migration patterns should be taken into account (Leibert 2016, Johansson 2016). Some negative infrastructure situations regarding integration are quite easily changeable, others not or only in a long term approach. Without changes in policy, integration costs will be “better distributed” (to both rural and urban areas) than integration benefits which will go to metropolitan areas, with problems there if integration fails.

The migration of refugees will not be the solution for regions with problems caused by out-migration of young people, but contributions are possible in different fields. A **regionally specific, integrated view** on the different factors of integration processes is crucial, therefore changes in local governance are needed. To overcome challenges of integration actors from local authorities, civil society and economy have to work together at the local level.

But the work on local level is embedded in a multi-level system. In general also at the federal level there is a lot of decision power to enable local activities. This is also relevant for typical funding schemes to support rural development (Pollermann et al. 2014b). Thus to use the chances there is a need of a **multi-level-integration governance**. Integration policy should have a long-term focus, but the first months are very important for the individuals, an “equal-rights”-approach instead of assimilation pressure would be useful.

Rural areas which want to play a role should be supported. There is a high **need for funding**, but in most cases in the context of rural development measures it is more effective to open existing funding schemes rather than to create new programs (example village shops, with ideas for multi-functionality). Funding opportunities like LEADER have already a regional-specific approach, and could be used for good-practice exchange.

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